**SUGGESTIONS FOR A COURSE SYLLABUS**

*Reinventing Food Banks and Pantries: New Tools to End Hunger*

By Katie Martin

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Katie taught undergraduate and graduate courses at the University of Connecticut as an Assistant Professor. She also taught undergraduate courses and directed the Public Health program at the University of Saint Joseph. Katie earned her PhD at Tufts University in the Friedman School of Nutrition Science & Policy.

The materials that follow are designed to help prepare a semester course consisting of 13 weeks. The materials include discussion topics, learning objectives and a suggested term-paper subject.

The basic text for this course is *Reinventing Food Banks and Pantries: New Tools to End Hunger*

by Katie Martin, Island Press, 2021, [https://islandpress.org/books/reinventing-food-banks-and-pantries](https://nam10.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fislandpress.org%2Fbooks%2Freinventing-food-banks-and-pantries&data=04%7C01%7Ckmartin%40foodshare.org%7C7506cb750d1e4db814c608d895778f37%7Cb1f9e34f11214c708f88aff49a1ef321%7C0%7C0%7C637423688038671074%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=Jrqc7v9O%2BBTmo6SlhVAgJ0KT45NcMNe1JCjDKE11mII%3D&reserved=0). Additional readings and suggested assignments are included for various weeks.

This course should be of interest to programs in community nutrition, public health, food systems, social work, public policy, and food justice. Parts of this syllabus can be incorporated into other courses on topics including food insecurity, charitable food, motivational interviewing, food access, and health equity.

**Overview:**

In 2019, more than 35 million Americans struggled with food insecurity, and nearly 1 in 4 households have experienced food insecurity due to COVID-19. Food banks and pantries have grown in number and size over forty years and are located in nearly every community in the U.S. Collectively they provide billions of meals a year to people in need. Yet food insecurity remains a persistent yet preventable public health issue. Most Americans have been involved in the charitable food system by donating food or volunteering at a food pantry or food bank. Yet very little research has been conducted to measure the impact of charitable food on the people served. This course presents a new model for charitable food, one where success is measured not by pounds of food distributed but by lives changed. Charitable food programs such as food pantries are part of the community food system, but they are often overlooked and considered merely a short-term provider of basic food needs. This course will highlight strategies for designing food pantries that can promote health and stability, reduce health disparities, and serve as empowering community hubs. One of the key themes is that it takes more than food to end hunger.

**Course Objectives:**

At the conclusion of this course, students will be able to understand the major components of the charitable food system in the U.S. Students will be familiar with the history of how food banks and food pantries evolved over the past forty years, and will have an understanding of root causes of hunger. Students will be able to provide examples of best practices that create a more holistic and empowering approach to tackling food insecurity. Students will be inspired to think differently about why hunger exists and how we have responded to it, and will be motivated to take an action step.

**Week 1:** Introduction

The goal of this book is bold yet simple: to reinvent the way we provide charitable food in America. While we have done good work to fight hunger, we can do better. In an effort to provide “emergency” food, we have designed programs that are largely transactional, with a focus on serving as many people as possible as quickly as possible. As an alternative, we can design food pantries that are instead relational and can be transformational, and which emphasize health, social justice, community, and a person-centered design.

**Learning Objectives:** Students will recognize that providing more food to more people over four decades has not and will not solve the problem of food insecurity. Students will start to imagine what a holistic food pantry could be.

**Readings:**

* Preface and Chapter 1: *Reinventing Food Banks and Pantries: New Tools to End Hunger*.
* Check out “Feeding America,” <https://www.feedingamerica.org/>

**Week 2**: History of Food Assistance Programs

If we want to end hunger, it’s important to understand the history of federal food assistance programs in the U.S. such as food stamps (SNAP) and child nutrition programs. It is also important to examine the evolution and expansion of charitable food banks and pantries over the past forty years. When we define the problem of hunger as a lack of food, then the solution is quite simple: grow, collect and distribute more food to those in need. But if we define hunger as a symptom of poverty caused by a broken system and rooted in inequalities, then the solution becomes more complex. If we want to get serious about truly ending hunger, we need to confront these more challenging root causes of hunger. Freshplace is a holistic food pantry model based in Hartford, Connecticut that tackles the underlying root causes of food insecurity by offering connection, coaching, and more than just food.

**Learning Objectives:** Students will understand the history of federal food assistance programs and how food banks have grown and evolved over the past several decades. Students will be able to explain root causes of food insecurity. The article on the development of Freshplace will give students the background of an innovative food pantry that has become a model for other food banks and food pantries.

**Readings:**

* Chapter 2: *Reinventing Food Banks and Pantries: New Tools to End Hunger*.
* Martin K, Shuckerow M, O’Rourke C, Schmitz A. Changing the Conversation about Hunger – the Process of Developing Freshplace. *Progress in Community Health Partnerships.* 2012 Winter;6(4):429-34. <https://doi:10.1353/cpr.2012.0056>

**Week 3**: Changing the Conversation about Hunger

Even though many food pantries have operated for over 30 years, and research shows that clients visit food pantries on a chronic basis, many organizations continue to use the term “emergency” to describe their programming. It is time for a paradigm shift in the way we think about and provide charitable food. A part of this shift comes from the language we use to describe the problem of food insecurity and our response to it. It is important to understand the history of how food security has been defined and measured by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and academic researchers. Key terms used frequently when describing charitable food are outlined, and suggested language is given to reflect current research and a more empowering approach to the problem of food insecurity.

**Learning Objectives:** Students will recognize the difference between a food bank and a food pantry, and will understand how food insecurity is defined and measured. Students will be able to describe the scarcity mentality and how it limits our approach to food security.

**Readings:**

* Chapter 3: *Reinventing Food Banks and Pantries: New Tools to End Hunger*.
* Anandi Mani, Sendhil Mullainathan, Eldar Shafir, and Jiaying Zhao, “Poverty impedes cognitive function,” *Science*, (2013);341(6149):976-980. doi:10.1126/science.1238041
* U.S. Department of Agriculture, “Food Security in the U.S.,”

[www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/](http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/)

**Week 4:** Creating a Welcoming Culture

Visiting a food pantry often conjures up images of embarrassment and shame. It doesn’t have to be this way. Students will be encouraged to think about the experience of clients (which are often referred to as guests or customers) when they go to a food pantry. It is important to recognize that being food insecure is traumatic, and trauma can be both a cause and effect of food insecurity. Having an understanding of trauma-informed care will help build empathy. There are simple and subtle ways to design pantries that have a welcoming environment, for example by having seating available and clear signage, designating a greeter, and de-escalating situations when tensions rise. To help move food pantries from transactional to transformational, we can use strategies from hospitality and customer service, taking tips from the retail and hotel industry.

**Learning Objectives:** Students will recognize that people who are living in poverty and who are food insecure may have experienced trauma, and will be able to describe ways to create a welcoming culture in a food pantry setting.

**Readings:**

* Chapter 4: *Reinventing Food Banks and Pantries: New Tools to End Hunger*.
* Sanderson J, Martin K, Colantonio A, Wu R. An Outcome Evaluation of Food Pantries Implementing the More than Food Framework. J Hunger Enviro Nutr. 2020. <https://doi:10.1080/19320248.2020.1748782>
* “Trauma Informed Organizational Toolkit,” <https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/downloads/report/Trauma_Informed_Organizational_Toolkit_0.pdf>

**Week 5**: The Dignity of Choice

In traditional food pantries, people wait in line and are handed a bag of food that has been prepared by volunteers. This system tends to work very well for volunteers, and the roles are clearly defined. It seems efficient because programs can serve a large number of people quickly and you know everyone is getting the same type and amount of food. But this system is not best for the people seeking help, can lead to food waste, and reinforces barriers between giver and receiver. One key step to transforming the way we provide charitable food is allowing people to shop for their food with dignity, like they would at a grocery store. When volunteers spend less of their time bagging food, they can spend more time greeting guests and building relationships. Offering client choice is an important first step in building equity within a food pantry setting.

**Learning Objectives:** Students will gain an appreciation for the benefits of offering client-choice in food pantries, and will understand ways to convert a pantry to allow guests to shop for their food. Students will understand common perceived barriers to offering choice and will be comfortable explaining the value of client choice.

**Readings:**

* Chapter 5: *Reinventing Food Banks and Pantries: New Tools to End Hunger*.
* Christopher Long, Marie-Rachelle Narcisse, Brett Rowland, Bonnie Faitak B, Caitlin Caspi, Joel Gittelsohn, and Pearl McElfish. “Written Nutrition Guidelines, Client Choice Distribution, And Adequate Refrigerator Storage Are Positively Associated With Increased Offerings Of Feeding America’s Detailed Foods To Encourage (F2E) In A Large Sample Of Arkansas Food Pantries,” *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, (2019), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2019.08.017.

**Week 6**: Promoting Healthy Food

Research shows that people who visit food pantries often have a double burden of food insecurity and chronic diseases, including both physical and mental health challenges. Despite strong evidence of the link between food security and health, more work is needed to improve the nutritional quality of food provided by food banks and pantries. Food pantries can be ideal settings to promote nutritious food and help reduce health disparities. Research shows that predominantly Black and Hispanic communities have fewer grocery stores and poorer quality food than predominantly white neighborhoods. Food banks and pantries can increase the supply and demand for healthy food by using a stoplight nutrition ranking system, creating nutrition policies, and using behavioral economic strategies to make the healthy choice the easy choice. Good nutrition at food pantries is largely a health issue, but it is also a matter of social justice. We should all be able to eat healthy food, regardless of income or zip code.

**Learning Objectives:** Students will recognize the strong link between food insecurity and poor health outcomes, particularly for people of color. Students will understand how nutrition policies can be powerful tools to improve the nutritional quality of food at food pantries. The additional articles describe the development and evidence behind the SWAP stoplight system (Supporting Wellness at Pantries).

**Readings:**

* Chapter 6: *Reinventing Food Banks and Pantries: New Tools to End Hunger,* by Katie Martin, Island Press, 2021.
* Martin K, Wolff M, Callahan K, Schwartz M. Supporting Wellness at Pantries (SWAP): Development of a nutrition stoplight system for food pantries. J Acad Nutr Diet. 2019 Apr;119(4):553-559. <https://doi:10.1016/j.jand.2018.03.003>
* Cooksey-Stowers K, Read M, Wolff M, Martin K, McCabe M, Schwartz M. Food Pantry Staff Attitudes about Using a Nutrition Rating System to Guide Client Choice. *J Hunger & Env Nutr.* 2018, <https://DOI:10.1080/19320248.2018.1512930>
* Marlene B. Schwartz & Hilary K. Seligman (2019) The Unrealized Health-Promoting Potential of a National Network of Food Pantries, *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*, 14:1-2, 1-3, DOI: [10.1080/19320248.2019.1569819](https://doi.org/10.1080/19320248.2019.1569819)

**Week 7**: Connecting to Community Services

To shift charitable food from transactional to relational, it is important to explore why people have a difficult time getting enough food and to address root causes of hunger. Rather than simply handing out food, pantry staff and volunteers can build relationships with guests and help connect them to existing community programs and services to offer wrap-around supports. More Than Food is an evidence-based program that improves food security, self-sufficiency and self-efficacy. The name stems from the fact that after providing billions of meals to people every year, we know that it takes more than food to end hunger. The More Than Food model is based on the Stages of Change theory and utilizes coaches who are trained in motivational interviewing skills in a strength-based and non-judgmental approach to help individuals set and reach goals. The coaches work one-on-one with individuals to identify the reasons why the family is struggling with food insecurity, and to connect the family with community resources that will build their self-sufficiency, such as job training, skill building, and education.

**Learning Objectives:** Students will recognize the value of providing wrap-around services within a food pantry to create longer-term solutions to food insecurity. Students will understand how the Stages of Change model and motivational interviewing techniques can be used to help people make behavior changes. The additional articles will describe how offering More Than Food can increase food security and other key outcomes and is a model that can be replicated in other food pantry settings.

**Readings:**

* Chapter 7: *Reinventing Food Banks and Pantries: New Tools to End Hunger*.
* Cherry K. “The 6 Stages of Behavior Change: The Transtheoretical or Stages of Change Model,” <https://www.verywellmind.com/the-stages-of-change-2794868>
* Martin K, Redelfs A, Wu R, Bogner O, Whigham L. “Offering More Than Food: Outcomes and lessons learned from a Fresh Start food pantry in Texas,”*Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition*, (2018). doi.org/10.1080/19320248.2018.1512925.
* Martin K, Colantonio A, Boyle K, Picho K. Self-Efficacy is Associated with Increased Food Security in Novel Food Pantry Program. *Soc Sci & Med – Pop Health.* 2016: 62-67*.* <https://doi:10.1016/j.ssmph.2016.01>
* Martin K, Wu R, Wolff M, Colantonio A, Grady J. A Novel Food Pantry Program: Food Security, Self-Sufficiency, and Diet-Quality Outcomes. *Am J Prev Med.* 2013;45(5):569–575. <https://doi:10.1016/j.amepre.2013.06.012>

**Week 8**: The Vital Role of Volunteers

The charitable food system would not exist if it weren’t for the valuable contributions of volunteers. Yet some volunteer experiences can have negative and unintended consequences. It is important to pose some hard questions related to the role of volunteers. For example, are food pantries providing food and services in ways that benefit their volunteers and donors or those struggling with food insecurity? Are charitable food programs open on days and times most convenient for volunteers or for guests, particularly working families? When the people who utilize a food pantry are able to volunteer their time, it helps break down the division between “us” and “them”. Strong leadership and volunteer training are often required to change the way food pantries operate.

**Learning Objectives:** Students will understand the vital role that volunteers play within the charitable food system, and recognize some unintended consequences with how volunteers operate within food pantries. Students will be able to describe alternative roles for volunteers to create a more empowering experience for guests.

**Readings:**

* Chapter 8: *Reinventing Food Banks and Pantries: New Tools to End Hunger*.
* In lieu of additional readings, this week an added assignment is for students to visit a local food pantry and write a brief reflection paper.

**Week 9**: Evaluation: What Gets Measured Gets Done

Even though there are food banks and food pantries in nearly every community across the country, and they have operated for decades, there is very limited research evaluating their impact. The validated USDA Food Security Module is a useful survey instrument for those interested in studying food security. While we know a lot about who is food insecure and who is most likely to go to food pantries, we know very little about what types of food pantries reduce food insecurity or what impact food pantries have on the health and well-being of those receiving food. There is tremendous opportunity for additional research within the charitable food system using both quantitative and qualitative data collection.

**Learning Objectives:** Students will understand how food security is measured and will recognize additional opportunities for research within food banks and food pantries.

**Readings:**

* Chapter 9: *Reinventing Food Banks and Pantries: New Tools to End Hunger*.
* In lieu of additional readings, students are asked to identify research questions and design a study to measure one aspect of a food pantry program.

**Week 10**: Structural Inequalities and Systems Change

Hunger in America has long been viewed as a non-partisan issue. When we define the problem as simply a lack of food, it is easy to rally support from politicians, corporations, and individuals to provide food for “the hungry.” But food insecurity is not caused by a lack of food, but a lack of political will by policymakers and decision makers. It is caused by systemic injustices, structural racism, and unequal privilege that create and perpetuate food insecurity for marginalized groups. Recognizing this can help food banks and pantries enter the political arena to advocate for a stronger social safety net and living wages. Engaging in advocacy will also help us move from charity to justice.

**Learning Objectives:** Students will understand how historic injustices and systemic racism are key drivers of food insecurity. Students will be able to describe strategies to address root causes of poverty and to advocate for systems change.

**Readings:**

* Chapter 10: *Reinventing Food Banks and Pantries: New Tools to End Hunger*.
* United Way, “United for ALICE,” <https://www.unitedforalice.org/overview>
* Michael Jindra and Ines W. Jindra, “*Poverty and the Controversial Work of Nonprofits,*” Social Science and Public Policy, (2016) <https://www.academia.edu/29592004/Poverty_and_the_Controversial_Work_of_Nonprofits>

**Week 11**: Equity within Food Banks and Pantries

As they advocate for more equitable policies in their broader communities, it is equally important that food banks and pantries promote equity from within their organizations. Examples are to engage people who have experienced food insecurity in leadership roles on the board of directors, pay living wages, and creating spaces for clients, volunteers and staff to build social capital. Food banks typically describe the impressive number of pounds they distribute each year, but often do not include the voices of those they serve. Ethical story telling is a powerful tool to listen to the experience of those who struggle with food insecurity. Sharing the stories and experiences of the people who visit food pantries can help reduce social stigma and serve as a powerful advocacy tool for broader systemic changes.

**Learning Objectives:** Students will understand the importance of equity, diversity and inclusion within charitable food organizations. Students will recognize the value of listening to those who experience food insecurity and will be able to describe ways to engage people with lived experience. Students will understand the value of social capital and advocacy within food pantry settings.

**Readings:**

* Chapter 11: *Reinventing Food Banks and Pantries: New Tools to End Hunger.*
* Tamarack Institute, Alison Homer, “Engaging people with lived/living experience: a guide for including people in poverty reduction,” <https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/Resources/Publications/10-Engaging%20People%20With%20LivedLiving%20Experience%20of%20Poverty.pdf>
* “Ethical Storytelling,” [www.ethicalstorytelling.com](http://www.ethicalstorytelling.com).

**Week 12**: New Partners and Community Food Hubs

New organizations are interested in partnering with food banks and food pantries. For example, healthcare providers and colleges recognize that their patients and students may be struggling with food insecurity and are finding creative ways to increase access to healthy food and reduce health disparities. Organizations don’t have to start from scratch and can use best practices such as client choice when creating a food pantry in a health care setting or college campus. Food banks and community stakeholders can use a collective impact approach to identify gaps within communities, consolidate smaller pantries, and develop a holistic community food hub that is open multiple days of the week and offers wrap-around services. This type of approach requires strong leadership from the food bank and other community partners and will help create a collaborative and coordinated response to food insecurity.

**Learning Objectives:** Students will understand the Hunger Vital Sign 2-item screener that can be used in health care settings to screen patients for food insecurity. Students will be able to describe various approaches for addressing food insecurity on college campuses. Students will also understand what a high-capacity and holistic food pantry could look like.

**Readings:**

* Chapter 12: *Reinventing Food Banks and Pantries: New Tools to End Hunger*.
* Geisinger Fresh Food Farmacy. https://www.geisinger.org/freshfoodfarmacy.
* Christopher Long, Brett Rowland, Susan Steelman, and Pearl McElfish,“Outcomes of disease prevention and management interventions in food pantries and food banks: a scoping review,” *BMJ Open* (2019);9:e029236.

**Week 13**: Conclusion – Take One Step

There isn’t one silver bullet to end hunger. But there are many ways, big and small, that we can improve the charitable food system to stop the cycle of hunger and poverty for the next generation. Yes, people are hungry in America, but they are hungry for more than just food. They are hungry for social connection, community, and justice. Recognizing that not everyone will be immediately ready for these changes, it is important to build organizational buy-in to adopt these new approaches in food banks and food pantries, and among community partners and academic researchers. There are reasons to be optimistic. We have a robust and extensive network of food banks and food pantries that can promote the health and stability of families and create a bridge for self-sufficiency rather than merely a short-term Band-Aid of food.

**Learning Objectives:** Students will understand how to apply some of the tools and evidence-based strategies and to share the lessons learned with others in their community. Students will understand steps for getting organizational buy-in and creating change within organizations. By the end of the course, students will be inspired to dream bigger about ways to address food insecurity.

**Readings:**

* Chapter 13: *Reinventing Food Banks and Pantries: New Tools to End Hunger*.
* “Community Food Centres Canada,” <https://cfccanada.ca/en/Home>

**Possible term paper topic:**

Describe a food pantry or food bank in your community. Which best practices described throughout the course is the organization using? What steps would you recommend they take to improve services for those struggling with food insecurity? How would you evaluate the impact of the change you suggest? What additional resources will be needed to implement the change? Describe who will need to be involved in order for the change to be successful.