

Universidad del Turabo Health Ambassadors



Cohort:
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Team Members:
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Location:
Gurabo, Puerto Rico

Focus Areas:
Food Systems & Nutrition

Background

Universidad del Turabo (UT) of the Ana G. Méndez University System (SUAGM, according to its Spanish acronym), is a non-profit, private, Hispanic-serving Institution that mostly serves students from the eastern central region of Puerto Rico. Many of our students are low-income backgrounds and first generation on college. Our student population is classified as 100 percent Hispanic, diverse and underserved.

Being students of low economic income faces us with a bigger problem, since they do not have the economic resources to access a healthy nutrition, our students as well as the staff members of the University are exposed to constant offers of lunches and dinners considered economical but not healthy. The places near the University that can contain healthy food dishes in their menu usually have a high cost. At our experience working with students and on campus staff members is that they hardly consider what they eat and the implications it has on their wellbeing and health.

Wicked Problem Description

We aim to work the very wicked problem of achieving a healthy plate in the Puerto Rican diet, with particular emphasis on fruit and vegetable consumption. This goal faces the seemingly unsurmountable hurdles of food insecurity, recently famous

natural disasters, and the less well-recognized disasters of centuries-old colonial relations.

According to the World Health Organization, approximately 16.0 million disability adjusted life years and 2.8% of deaths worldwide are attributable to low fruit and vegetable consumption. Furthermore, insufficient intake of fruit and vegetables is estimated to cause around 14% of gastrointestinal cancer deaths, about 11% of ischemic heart disease deaths and about 9% of stroke deaths globally. In 2011, the Harvard School of Public Health launched its Healthy Eating Plate, an updated riposte to the USDA's My Plate based on the best available scientific evidence. This visual representation of a balanced diet designates half the plate, or 50% of the diet, to fruits and vegetables.

Contrast that to the information about the Puerto Rican diet in the latest available document of the Department of Health (Rodríguez, 2014) 48.1% of people consume one (1) or less portions of fruit a day, and 7.3% of people consume no fruit at all every day. Furthermore, 49.9% of Puerto Ricans consume less than two (2) portions of vegetables a day, and 24.2% consume less than one (1) portion a day. In 2012, the age-adjusted rates of death per 100,000 inhabitants for cancer, heart disease and stroke were 124.3, 117.6, and 31.8 respectively. Thus, you may understand why the energy sources we are aiming to increase for Puerto Ricans are the humble lettuces and eggplants.

Project Strategies

To address the problem of the inclusion of a plate of healthy food within the Puerto Rican diet, as well as within the socio-economic conditions of the Puerto Rican family, we intend to develop an interdisciplinary educational program for the students and staff of the Universidad del Turabo. Where we can discuss the importance of healthy eating, adequate consumption of vegetables and fruits in the daily diet, as well as the negative implications of not carrying out such consumption. The purpose of carrying out this educational process in students, in addition to aspiring to change their eating habits, is to make them become educators of their peers, as well as promote their insertion in community spaces where they can help the families of the communities surrounding the University to understand the importance of adequate consumption of vegetables and fruits in the daily diet as a preventive measure. The integration of students in the community will allow, beyond the training of professionals for the practice of a trade, to train professionals with critical capacity for the development of their knowledge in benefit of the needs and interests of their community and, therefore of his country.

For this, we propose the use of Popular Education as a reference, through which there is the possibility of building, from knowledge and joint action, and provide tools to build their way. Popular Education is considered a political tool, which means that it allows people through reflection processes and sharing of ideas to take over their lives to create the spaces required to transform their realities. This is one of the goals we have as a project to ensure that the people impacted not only know the

importance of healthy nutrition but that through their new habits they can promote changes both in their lives and in the food suppliers that offer their services in and near the university campus. Why we use popular education, because it is a dynamic tool that converted the process of learning new ideas and realities through play, socializing and recreation, turning our learning into a transformative adventure.

Outcomes

The UT Health Ambassadors main goal is to increase knowledge and access to healthy eating options and environments in Puerto Rican Adults at Universidad del Turabo that will promote and facilitate a culture of health to all involved. For this purpose, our project will have three major phases that in turn are subdivided into short and long-term phases:

1. Educational aspect – was focused on impact not just the students and university staff also we want to extend this educational process to geographic communities near to the Campus
2. Growing seeds of health program – activity in which we expect students from the three academic programs to be involved in the planting and harvesting of food to be distributed among the university community
3. Access to healthy food – space in which the student will be able to obtain healthy meals on the university campus; as well learn how to make healthy and economic menus.

Timeline

These three aspects have short- and long-term elements. As short term we can identify aspects of gathering information, identification of specific strategies for the implementation of each of the three major phases that will be considered a long-term element.

- Phase 1: integration into the RWJF Program, recruitment of student facilitators, design of the Culture of Health Interdisciplinary Class, the Health Ambassadors Modules and orchard.
- Phase 2: planning of educational activities for student associations, integration of the health culture course into the academic curriculum, design and identification of resources for the UT Food Oasis.
- Phase 3: creation of the university garden, implementation of the educational modules and Food Oasis, offer the health culture course, community impact.
- Phase 4: evaluation and analysis of the strategies implemented.

Partnerships

The proposed project will be housed under the sponsorship of the School of Social Sciences and Communications (SSSC), Counseling Psychology Program. The project will be administered by the PI, Dr. Úrsula Aragunde Kohl, with the assistance of (4)

graduate level students from the UT Counseling Psychology, Social Work and Naturopathic Medicine Program, who will be specially trained to implement and facilitate the project under the direct supervision of the PI and Co PIs, Dr. Fernando Janer and Lydael M Vega Otero. This opportunity will help to train a new generation of underrepresented Hispanic graduate students in cultures of health and positive leadership. As a project we aim to establish partnerships with entities or individuals in the country who work matters related to healthy eating, for guidance processes to the university community. And the identification of community spaces to impact them with educational processes that enable the development of a culture of health.

Evaluation Strategies

Universidad del Turabo will conduct formative and summative evaluation. Formative evaluation will assess the development and implementation of project's processes and activities. The design for formative evaluation will include components of the interactive evaluation, as well as the monitoring evaluation. Summative evaluation will assess the achievement of project's objectives and its impact on participating subjects. The design for summative evaluation will facilitate the assessment of the impact of the project and will provide findings from which conclusions about project's achievements, outcomes, impact can be made, and causal inferences about the effect of the project can be drawn.

The proposed evaluation approach and methods will be aligned to the goals, objectives and performance measures set forth in the project, will take into consideration key challenges and opportunities that the project might be facing, and will develop adequate assessment tools. The specific evaluation objectives are the following: 1) assess progress toward objectives completion and provide recommendations; 2) determine the effectiveness of the project; and, 3) determine the impact of the project.