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A Self-Study of FRN Olivet: A Student-Led Food Recovery Model on a University Campus

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Cover Page Footnote

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Thank you to Dr. Lynda Allen, my faculty mentor, for the guidance and encouragement she has given me throughout my entire college career, for her investment not only in this research project but in Enactus and the Food Recovery Network as well, and for her dedication to prepare students for a successful professional career and life of service.

Thank you to Dr. Schurman, who listened to my vision and helped me to think creatively about what this project could look like. Thank you to Dr. Case, who affirmed me in my work and encouraged me to complete this project. Thank you to my Honors professors and the other students in my cohort for their support over the last four years.

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ABSTRACT

An alarming amount of unserved food, which emits carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, is thrown away daily on university campuses. In those same college communities, there is likely a large food insecure population that is going to bed hungry every night. The Food Recovery Network (FRN) is a network of colleges and universities across the United States that seeks to bridge this gap. The FRN chapter at Olivet Nazarene University, established in October 2017, encountered challenges in its first couple years of operation because there were not yet many resources that laid out best practices for a food recovery program on a college campus. In order to strengthen the FRN Olivet chapter and aid other universities in the implementation and operation of their own FRN chapter, a comprehensive model was created that lays out the processes used, the challenges faced, and the resources created by the FRN Olivet chapter. The model contains the following sections: an author's note, the importance of starting an FRN chapter, implementing an FRN chapter, volunteers (composition, recruitment, and retention), recoveries, deliveries, training and development, social media, finance and fundraising, an all-school food drive called Move Out for Hunger, additional events such as awareness days and educational opportunities, and a succession plan. The FRN Olivet Model was reviewed by seven individuals and revised according to their suggestions. The goal is that by reading a single section, a representative from another university would have enough information to gain an understanding of how the system could be replicated successfully.

Keywords: food waste, food insecurity, food recovery, fight hunger, model, feeding program, university, student-led

INTRODUCTION

Until three years ago on the campus of Olivet Nazarene University, the excess food that was prepared but not served in the cafeteria was thrown away, filling landfills and harming the environment. While this food was being wasted, over 15,000 individuals in Kankakee County, where Olivet is located, were suffering from food insecurity. The Food Recovery Network (FRN), implemented at Olivet in October of 2017, sought to bridge this gap through the work of a team of 45 student volunteers recovering leftover food on campus and delivering it to The Salvation Army in Kankakee. Since then, the donated food continues to provide a free, hot lunch to 100 food-insecure individuals each weekday.

The national organization of Food Recovery Network is made up of over 230 chapters, which combined have recovered almost four million pounds of food since its establishment in 2011. That means that over four million pounds of food have been diverted from landfills, avoiding immense environmental damage. It also means that over three million meals have been donated to food insecure families and individuals across 44 states. Even though this is a large and certainly meaningful impact, it pales in comparison to how much food is still being wasted daily. There are still university campuses that are throwing their excess food away rather than repurposing it.

Furthermore, there are still community needs across the country as well as organizations in the same communities that have the resources to meet the need. The goal of this project is two-fold—to contribute to the work of filling this gap by creating a model of this program that can be replicated and implemented elsewhere and to be a guide to continue the process of improving the FRN chapter at Olivet in the years to come.

Though successful, the food recovery program at Olivet has room for growth, which can be accomplished by the analysis of the methods, leadership, and goal-oriented action that exist. As the leader of this chapter, I conducted a self-study that will serve as a model to other universities that are seeking to meet similar needs. The main focus of the present project is to compile research and past FRN Olivet data in hopes that the existing FRN chapter at ONU will be enhanced and will be able to multiply its impact by assisting other universities in implementing their own Food Recovery Network chapter.

This project seeks to provide a starting point for student advocates at other universities looking to address the dual problems of food waste on their campuses and hunger in their communities. Though there have been brief journal articles and news articles that report on student-led hunger-fighting initiatives, there has not been documented research that specifically looks at the idea of a hot meal feeding program receiving resources from a campus cafeteria. Many communities have existing issues of university food waste and food insecurity. Speaking from experience, implementing a program like this without resources or a model on which to base the planning is incredibly difficult.

This self-study outlines the processes—both past and present—of Olivet's Food Recovery Network, which is unique in the present research as there are currently no other models of existing Food Recovery Network chapters. The model contains the following sections: an author's note, the importance of starting an FRN chapter, implementing an FRN chapter, volunteers (composition, recruitment, and retention), recoveries, deliveries, training and development, social media, finance and fundraising, an all-school food drive called Move Out for Hunger, additional events such as awareness days and educational opportunities, and a succession plan. Each section contains a description of that specific part of the FRN process as well as the systems used by the chapter at Olivet Nazarene University. The goal is that by reading a single section, a representative from another university would have enough information to gain an understanding of how the system could be replicated. Upon completion, the model was reviewed by seven individuals, each of whom belongs to one of the following groups: business professors who can evaluate the model design, members of the FRN Olivet team who can verify the completeness and accuracy of the data, and other leaders of FRN chapters and FRN National representatives who can evaluate whether or not this model is representative and if it would be helpful for interested universities. The FRN self-study resulted in a complete model, which combines past methods with present research to create a guide to address what has been most successful and which resources are most effective in program implementation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In completing this project, I first needed to explore the existing research related to the topics of food waste, food insecurity, feeding programs, program implementation, and the process of creating a model.

Food Waste, Hunger, and Feeding Programs

Food waste, when added to landfills, has a detrimental impact on the environment. Tonini, Albizzati, and Astrup (2018) conducted a study that analyzed the environmental impacts of avoidable food waste from a bottom-up life cycle assessment method based on the four main sectors of food supply: processing, wholesale and retail, food service, and households. The group of researchers found that the impact of food waste on the environment was most prevalent during food production in each sector, producing effects such as global warming, acidification, aquatic eutrophication, human toxicity cancer, and water depletion. Food waste commonly follows food production as a natural next step. It is not only harmful to the environment, but it is also a valuable resource that is wasted.

According to a report issued by the National Resources Defense Council, 40% of the food supply in the United States is not eaten; this is an unbelievable statistic but is even more eye-opening considering that “reducing food losses by just 15 percent would be enough food to feed more than 25 million Americans every year at a time when one in six Americans lack a secure supply of food to their tables” (Gunders, 2012, p. 1). The conflicting natures of the enormous need in the United States and the wasteful nature of many Americans is a tragic situation that requires intentional action and mitigation.

Similar to food waste, the world issue of hunger and food insecurity is prevalent virtually everywhere. Food insecurity “refers to the lack of nutritious foods in sufficient quantities to maintain good health” (Ke & Ford-Jones, 2015, p. 1). Growing up in a food-insecure household has negative effects on overall health in the present time but can also be harmful later in life. Inattention in schools, suicide and depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and several chronic diseases are shown to be effects of childhood food insecurity. Looking specifically at Kankakee County, it is clear that it is no outlier to this problem of food insecurity. The Kankakee County food insecurity rate at 14% is higher than the average rate for both Illinois (12%) and the United States (13%); further, 30% of individuals lack sufficient access to healthy food (Steering Committee for the Partnership for a Healthy Community, 2018).

Feeding programs have been a common tactic to fight against food insecurity even though they are often criticized for giving handouts. Ke and Ford-Jones (2015) suggest that food supplementation is the preferred solution over a food bank because it offers more nutritious meal options. Rather than food being full of preservatives, the recipients of supplemented food commonly receive a well-rounded meal intentionally planned by a dietician at its original location. When a person decides to seek out help from others, the place they first turn to is known as a first access site. O’Toole et al. (2007) conducted a study that stemmed from the question of whether first access sites

are prepared to help the homeless population beyond their physical needs. The results showed that the most accessed site after becoming homeless was a soup kitchen. Thus, these organizations are given the opportunity of early intervention and therefore should be the most effective in their aid. To do so, they need to be prepared to not only identify the needs of those they serve but also to offer services to those individuals based upon those needs (O’Toole et al., 2007). In addition, as relationships form through repeated visits to a soup kitchen, homeless individuals are more likely to seek assistance at that location because they have grown to trust the organization (Papa, Papa, Kandath, Worrell, & Muthuswamy, 2005).

Program Implementation and Model Creation

The following section will discuss research relating to project implementation and model creation. The studies found are connected to trends seen in the Food Recovery Network chapter at Olivet Nazarene University.

Each community is different and has its own unique needs. It is important to seek to understand how to meet individual needs within a program, especially as FRN Olivet begins to work in unfamiliar communities. The Dartington approach includes a tool called Matching Needs and Services (MNS). Within this approach, a seven-step service design was developed based on the eight-step needs analysis (Taylor, 2005). By partnering a need with a desired outcome, a plan can be developed based on what steps need to be taken and what services should be offered to begin solving the problem. It is important to start a project with an end goal in mind. In the case of FRN Olivet, the leadership team first identified the problem of prepared but unserved food being thrown away daily in the campus cafeteria. The desired outcome was that the food could be used to feed food insecure individuals in our community. We connected with The Salvation Army in Kankakee, whose staff was searching for a food donor for their hot lunch program. By matching a need with a service as mentioned in the study above, we were then able to begin planning and executing the logistics of bridging this gap by creating a food recovery program at Olivet.

Another helpful strategy in implementing a program at the institutional level is to have one person or “champion” that pushes for growth (Young, Shinnar, Ackerman, Carruthers, & Young, 2007). This has been the trend used by FRN Olivet over the last three years as the leader has done the majority of the goal-setting and foundational work. Representatives from a university that is interested in establishing their own FRN chapter will need to find their “champion” that will take initiative. It is important that there is always an advocate pushing for progress for the program.

Volunteer involvement is a vital piece to a service-based program and will be a necessary aspect to include in the model created in this research. Different motivational factors correspond with volunteer recruitment and retention because perceptions change as one gets more involved. The Faith-Based Volunteer Motivation (FVM) scale was developed to evaluate motivation based on values, social, enrichment, and career factors (Erasmus & Morey, 2016). Though values were the prominent motivator for faith-based volunteers in the beginning stages, the study shows that social and enrichment

factors became more important for satisfaction and retention. This is a trend that has been seen at Olivet. The majority of our volunteers join with the motivator being their values and passion to spark change. On the other hand, FRN Olivet has lacked the enhancement of the social experience of the volunteers, which could be a reason for periods of retention issues.

In the same way that it is important to consider the factors that motivate volunteers, it is equally valuable to consider the common reasons that volunteers leave community service organizations. Milbourn, Black, and Buchanan’s (2019) study showed that the main responses given by those who were once enthusiastic about the mission were work burnout, lack of autonomy, alienation, disconnect, and lack of faith in leadership. The researchers suggest that organizations begin to integrate improved retention methods slowly with new volunteers to help with a smooth transition rather than abruptly changing the volunteerism structure. This is a strategy that has been used at FRN Olivet as we have slowly added new features, such as recovery reminders and volunteer events. By following this strategy, we have seen improvements in our volunteer retention. Specific to food recovery programs, the FRN National Team (2017) developed a resource that outlines the best methods for volunteer recruitment, effectively reaching students by setting up a table, and outreach. Volunteer motivators and recruitment methods, specifically the variety of successful and unsuccessful strategies used at Olivet in its first four years of existence, will be a large component of the model.

The issue of food waste on college campuses and food insecurity in communities is one that is prevalent virtually everywhere, but it does not have to be this way. Normalizing food recovery is a significant goal, but it is certainly worthwhile. By creating a model of an effective food recovery program and making it available to others, a difference can be made one community at a time. The model resulting from the present research will be unique as it describes the process of implementing, executing, and developing the chapter of the Food Recovery Network at Olivet Nazarene University.

MODEL

The fully formatted PDF version of the model is accessible online at the following link: https://digitalcommons.olivet.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?filename=0&article=1133&context=honr_proj&type=additional. This is the copy of the model that will be shared as a resource to other universities.

CRITICAL REVIEWS & RESPONSE

Reviewers

Seven individuals reviewed the FRN Olivet Model that was created in the present research. For the purposes of this section, each will be assigned a number. The corresponding number and role of each individual are listed below.

1. FRN Olivet Co-President / Enactus Leadership Team Member
2. FRN Olivet Enactus Leadership Team Member / Delivery Leader

3. Past Olivet SDA President / FRN Olivet Recovery Leader / Volunteer
4. FRN Olivet Faculty Advisor
5. FRN National Staff, Program and Special Events Fellow
6. FRN Chapter President – University of Delaware
7. FRN Chapter President – Western Kentucky University / Past FRN National Intern / Member of Student and Alumni Advisory Board

The completed model and a reviewer feedback form were sent to each reviewer via email. There are two feedback sections included in this form: rating scales and free response. In the rating scale section, the reviewers were asked to rate three statements on a scale from one to ten regarding the comprehensive nature and effectiveness of the model. There was also a space provided for the reviewers to leave a comment related to each rating if they wished. The free response section allowed reviewers to give written feedback on the areas of strength, the areas lacking information, the impact of FRN Olivet, and any additional comments.

Rating Scales

Reviewers were asked to rate the following on a scale from one to ten (one = strongly disagree, ten = strongly agree).

1. The topics covered within the model fully represent the work of an FRN chapter throughout the course of an academic year.
2. If I didn’t know about the food recovery network, this model would give me understanding and sufficient knowledge to lead my own chapter.
3. Challenges and obstacles faced in running a Food Recovery Network program are adequately addressed.

The results are displayed in the following table:

TABLE 1: REVIEWER FEEDBACK RESULTS

Table 1 Reviewer feedback results on FRN Olivet Model effectiveness (one = strongly disagree, ten = strongly agree)								
Statement	Reviewer Score							Average Rating
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1	10	10	10	10	9	9	10	9.7
2	10	10	10	10	7	7	9	9
3	10	10	10	9	9	9	9	9.4

Discussion of Rating Scale Results

The first statement, “the topics covered within the model fully represent the work of an FRN chapter throughout the course of an academic year,” had the highest average rating of the three statements at 9.7. Those who gave a rating of 10 commented that the model was incredibly descriptive, extremely thorough, and clearly defined. One reviewer mentioned that the model provided the big picture as well as important details. Another reviewer, who gave this statement a rating of 9, suggested that further quantitative description be added to the model to provide reasonable expectations to the new chapter leaders. The average rating of 9.7 shows that the model is fully representative of the work of an FRN chapter. That being said, FRN chapters should be able to reference this model throughout their year as needed.

The second statement, “if I didn’t know about the food recovery network, this model would give me understanding and sufficient knowledge to lead my own chapter,” has the lowest rating of the three statements at an average of 9. Four reviewers gave this statement a rating of 10, commenting that the fully comprehensive and easy-to-follow model would act as a road map to give inspiration and confidence to leaders. It is significant to note that the three ratings below 10 were given from individuals who have real experience with the process of implementing and leading an FRN chapter. A rating of 9 was given by one of the chapter presidents with a suggestion to include instructions on how to form a chapter and communicate with FRN National. The FRN National staff member and the other chapter president both rated this statement at a 7. Although FRN National would like to share this with their “Chapters in Progress,” they would like to see instructions on how to recruit leadership team members and how to communicate with stakeholders. The chapter president recommended more information on who we connected with to recruit volunteers and establish key operations. Overall, this statement received a very positive rating, and the suggestions given by these key reviewers will be helpful for improvement moving forward.

The third statement, “challenges and obstacles faced in running a Food Recovery Network program are adequately addressed,” has an average reviewer rating of 9.4. The three reviewers that have worked directly as student volunteers with FRN Olivet each gave this statement a perfect rating. This is encouraging because each individual directly faced these challenges, so we can conclude that every challenge FRN Olivet faced was addressed within the model. Some of their comments included that the model was transparent in expressing areas where FRN Olivet has struggled, how we learned from it, and the more effective practices we created. The remaining four reviewers gave this statement a rating of 9. Three reviewers mentioned that although the challenges that FRN Olivet encountered were adequately addressed and interesting to read, other FRN chapters will face unique challenges on their campuses. Another reviewer suggested making the challenges stand out more visibly.

Free Response

There were four questions in this section for reviewers to respond to.

1. What are areas of strength in the model?
2. What areas are lacking or need extra description? Are there any sections that should be added?
3. In 1-3 sentences, how has FRN Olivet made an impact? (This could be on you personally, on Olivet, in Kankakee County, on other chapters, etc.)
4. Additional Comments:

Discussion of Free Responses

Many areas of strength were identified by the reviewers. The visual strengths included readability, formatting, and use of pictures and colors. Multiple reviewers commented on the strength of the author’s note and the section explaining the importance of an FRN chapter as they provided a significant introduction and purpose to the model. Some of the stronger sections mentioned were “Move Out for Hunger” and the “Volunteers” (recruitment and retention) section. Overall, the resources that were linked and displayed in the model were helpful to the reviewers in their understanding. Most of the reviewers mentioned that they appreciated the thoroughness and comprehensive nature of the model as well as the description of challenges faced in the past. The staff member of FRN National included that the scheduling software that we use is unique to Olivet, so she would like to share that section with other chapters. One of the chapter presidents said that this resource is unique in the amount of specific detail to any others that he has read. Finally, one of the reviewers complimented the areas of opportunity included and the ways in which FRN Olivet would like to grow.

There were a couple of sections that reviewers suggested to be added to the model. Multiple reviewers desired further elaboration upon the “Recoveries” section, specifically how to fill out the forms and the food tracking forms. Similarly, one reviewer recommended that more quantitative data be included to illustrate the scale of FRN Olivet’s work. Another common suggestion was to include a section on how to officially start the chapter and who should be involved. Three reviewers would like to see elaboration on leadership, specifically transition between leaders and the roles of the leadership team. A minor suggestion was to add the statistics that resulted from the Weigh the Waste campaign described in the “Additional Events” section. A couple of more creative ideas included creating a calendar of our chapter’s operation throughout an academic year and describing the content of our communications with volunteers. To end the model, one reviewer recommended adding a summary section. The changes resulting from these suggestions are described in the following section.

Each reviewer commented on the impact of FRN Olivet. Some reviewers were more involved with the project than others, but all of them were able to speak on the importance of this chapter. The main emphases of those directly involved with FRN Olivet either presently or in the past were on the impact on the campus of Olivet, Kankakee County, and the students involved in recoveries and leadership. The volunteers specifically are beginning to see that “they can make a difference now and in the future.” Another reviewer was inspired by the way the school has partnered with the community to

help others. From the perspective of FRN National, the chapter at Olivet has been “a standout chapter in the Midwest for several years” and is passionate about “changing the scope of food insecurity and food waste.” Even though the FRN chapter presidents from other universities have not directly worked with FRN Olivet, one commented that this model has given increased hope that we, societally, can help to bridge the gap between food insecurity and existing resources.

Finally, the reviewers were given a chance to leave additional comments that may not have fit under any of the other prompts. This helps to ensure that they were given the opportunity to share all of their feedback. Many used this as an opportunity to share grammatical or spelling errors that they found while reading. Others included a note of encouragement to me or a statement about the effectiveness of this model. One of the FRN chapter presidents from another university mentioned that the model gave her ideas that she would like to implement in her own chapter. It was encouraging to see that the reviewers were confident that this model will go on to fulfill its purpose of strengthening the chapter at Olivet and of helping other universities with their FRN chapter implementation or execution.

Response

Because one of the goals of the present research was to create a model that is effective and useful for existing Food Recovery Network chapters and universities interested in creating their own, I chose to make edits to the model corresponding to the received feedback. The resulting edits are described below, and the final version of the model is included as an appendix.

I began by editing all grammatical errors that were found by the reviewers. Next, I began to add additional description to existing sections where it was suggested. In the “Author’s Note,” I added some of FRN Olivet’s quantitative data to give perspective on the scale of our project. Two subsections were added into the “Recoveries” section; I inserted one that gave detailed instructions on how to fill out the forms during the recovery and examples of each completed form and one about the food tracking forms (which is commonly referred to in the model as logging the recovery). A couple of reviewers desired further elaboration on our leadership regarding the roles of the team, how we communicate with our stakeholders, and the transition between leaders. This resulted in additions to the Volunteer Composition subsection, specifically under the Enactus heading, and the Succession Plan section. To improve organization and reader experience, page numbers were also added to the model.

Two complete sections were added to the FRN Olivet model as a result of the suggestions given by the reviewers. A common opinion was that the model was missing information on how to implement an FRN chapter and who to connect with to do so. To solve that problem, I added the “Implementing an FRN chapter” section. This section describes the steps that a student must take to officially begin a chapter on their campus as well as conversations that take place behind the scenes with groups on campus, the food service, and the partner agency. The second section that was added to the model was a summary at the end, which highlights the main operations of an FRN chapter and a closing thought.

Overall, I was encouraged by the positive feedback given by the reviewers and the confidence that this model will be useful for individuals in the leadership of their FRN chapters. The ideas and suggestions are vital to the improvement of the model and its effectiveness moving forward.

CONCLUSION

Across the country, colleges and universities have a problem with food waste. In those same communities, there is likely a population of food insecure individuals who do not have access to a sufficient amount of nutritious food. The Food Recovery Network seeks to fill this gap nationwide. In Kankakee County, where Olivet Nazarene University is located, FRN Olivet has been working to fight food waste and feed people for seven semesters thus far. In that time, over 19,000 pounds of food have been recovered and over 15,840 meals have been donated to the food insecure. This program has made a lasting impact not just on those who are receiving the food, but also on the student volunteers. A past volunteer and leadership team member stated that being a part of FRN has “provided such an easy and tangible way to volunteer and make an incredible impact in our community.” The FRN Olivet faculty advisor gave the following quote:

“It would be difficult to overstate the impact of this effort. I see the impact measured quantitatively in meals provided, dollars saved, and waste avoided. But I believe the most significant impact has been on the students who have been a part of this effort. It isn’t just the founders, but all who recover and deliver food. Those lives have been changed as they see that through their volunteer efforts, they can make a difference now and in the future.”

The FRN chapter at Olivet has been one of strength and consistency and according to an FRN National staff member, “a standout chapter in the Midwest for several years.” As can be seen through these quotes, the impact made by FRN Olivet has been very meaningful, and the purpose of the present research is to multiply this impact.

The end product of the present research is the FRN Olivet Model, which is a 51 page PDF file that has been fully formatted to be user friendly and easy to navigate. Within the model, there are many resources used and created by the team at Olivet that are linked to the file. The goal of this model is to strengthen the existing program at Olivet and to multiply the impact of FRN Olivet by providing a resource to guide other universities in implementing and executing their own FRN chapter. The model was reviewed by seven individuals and edited corresponding to their feedback. The feedback given by the reviewers supports that the model is comprehensive and would be helpful to student leaders in their experience with an FRN chapter. A staff member at FRN National shared that she would like to give this model to Chapters-in-Progress to use as a resource in their program implementation. The FRN chapter founder and president at Western Kentucky University said that reviewing the FRN Olivet model has given her ideas that she would like to implement in her own chapter. Thus, the model seems to meet the goal of being useful to both new and existing FRN chapters.

A limitation of this research is that each university is unique in regard to size, dining services, student involvement, and much more. That being said, some of the processes and strategies utilized at FRN Olivet may not be applicable or easy to replicate at another university. For that reason, chapter leaders are encouraged to modify our strategies to fit their unique chapter and gain ideas and guidance from the model that can help them find what would work best at their university. Further research could include collecting feedback from the future FRN Olivet leader and those who use the model either to begin or strengthen their chapter. This would show the effectiveness of the model when it is in use as a guide.

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