

The East Portland Lunch Cart
United States of America
Connecticut College
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dishingupportland.wordpress.com

Section I:

The central goal of the projects were to increase knowledge about cooking with local produce in a food desert community. We also aimed to provide information for the community about where healthy and affordable foods could be purchased in the community, from farmers markets to ethnic grocery stores. In addition to the funding that the Davis Foundation provided for the project, Connecticut College granted \$3000 to Azul Tellez for living expenses through the CELS program.

Our project, which we called Dishing Up Portland, consisted of leading free, weekly cooking classes at a certified kitchen in the community. We used produce from local, urban farms so that we could raise awareness about their role in the community and to support them financially. The recipes we chose each week varied in cultural origin and difficulty, but in general we aimed to find a balance between easy to make yet captivating recipes. The other component of our project was the food cart which we would take to one or two events each week in East Portland, such as street fairs, post-mass at churches and meetings for community events. At these events, we would serve the meals that we cooked in the class that week on a pay-what-you-can basis. This meant that there was an opaque bucket on the counter of the cart that people could drop \$0-\$4 into. At the cart we had a sign up sheet for our cooking classes, free recipe cards, and a link to our website which has lots of information about cooking on a budget. In general, we were open to talking about food and cooking with people and tried to inspire them to do so.

The Portland community was very supportive of our project considering we had no previous links to organizations and neighborhood residents. We spent the few two weeks getting our name out there and, in general, organizations were willing to help us in any way they could. We also received enthusiasm from local news including the East Portland Bee (<http://eastpdxnews.com/general-news-features/cooking-classes-and-food-cart-bring-accessible-food-to-east-portland/>) and the local KATU news station (<http://www.katu.com/familymatters/commit-2-be-fit/Eliminating-food-deserts-Helping-people-eat-healthy-268592312.html?mobile=y>).

One of the biggest challenges we had was measuring the success of our project. There was no simple way to measure the effect that our project had on the community. We hope that the people that came to the classes will continue to cook with fresh vegetables and that the people who ate at our cart will be inspired to make the meal at home, but there's no way measure this. Also, we noticed that the people who were most supportive of our project were people who already knew about cooking with healthy foods and were of higher income levels. Although the positive reactions were gratifying, they were usually from individuals whose livelihoods mirrored our cause.

In addition, there was less conversation at the cart than we had hoped. Most people would take the food without asking questions about our project or cooking in general. We were happy to sell people cheap, healthy meals and we didn't expect anything in return from them in the form of conversation. However, it would have been gratifying to have more casual conversations with people about their opinions on cooking.

Another we faced was that we spent so much time with the logistical components, such as making sure we got the ingredients for the classes and printing our recipe cards, that we sometimes lost

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sight of our goals. There were days at the cart when we were so exhausted from having cooked all day that we had no energy to engage people in energetic conversation. It was times like these when we realized that the project needed to be run by at least four people, for many months, to be the most successful, with measurable impacts.

Many of the ideas that we had for the project did not get enacted because of lack of time. We often joked about needing an intern. Some of these ideas included having guest cooks from the community teach classes, giving the students ingredients to take home with them, making a recipe book, and having students from the classes work some of the food cart shifts. Luckily, there is an opportunity for these ideas to be realized because the East Portland Neighborhood Association (EPNA), whom we met with to talk about the project on various occasions, has agreed to continue the project. We have passed on the food cart and all of the information we gathered to them. The EPNA members who will continue the project consist of both neighborhood residents and full-time staff at the association. Since they are located in deep East Portland, which is the worst part of the food desert, and since they already have ties with the community, their continuation of the project will likely be very successful. They plan on receiving funding through grants and have stated that they don't think they will have trouble receiving sufficient funding.

Section II

Peace is achieved when people feel as though they can live their lives in security, comfort, and without threat. People should feel as though they are not deprived of what they need to live healthy, happy lives. Living in a food desert does not foster a sense of security and comfort for neighborhood residents. In the short term, we promoted peace by striving to make it easier for people to identify where they could purchase healthy, affordable foods in East Portland. We hope that this made people feel more secure in the neighborhood. In addition, Dishing Up Portland contributes to peace by creating a space for people to talk about what they like to cook, what they'd like to learn how to cook, what it's like to live in a food desert, etc. At the free cooking classes that we held each week, we discussed many different topics surrounding food, cooking and healthy food access. We hope that these discussions and the cooking classes built people's confidence in their ability to cook. If people became motivated to cook at home, they would be improving their health and the health of their families, which creates a more peaceful community.

In the long-term, we hoped to have continued to raise awareness about the inequity of healthy food access in Portland. The more projects that bring food deserts to light, the more likely policy will be enacted to improve the situation. Most importantly, the East Portland Neighborhood Association has already had initial meetings to continue the project, which is the best case scenario!

Having completed our portion of Dishing Up Portland, I am convinced that grass-roots projects, in which the project directors interact with the community directly, are of utmost importance. Getting to know the community members individually, and talking to them about their experiences and hopes is essential for progress. I am now motivated to pursue food justice, grassroots initiatives in my future.

“Davis 100 Projects for Peace gave Emily and me the rare opportunity to make all of the major decisions in a self-run project. This gave me the chance to discover what my strengths and weaknesses are as an activist and has given me a clearer idea of what I want to do once I graduate.” - Azul Tellez

