



During high school, Jessica's civic efforts were focused on reducing educational disparity in Chicago Public Schools. To that end, she served as president of Students Helping Our World (S.H.O.W.), an organization that partners with city schools to incentivize students to improve their grades and attendance, leading 6,000 students to improve their academic performance. Upon arriving at Penn, Jessica continued her work in education, serving as a college counselor at a West Philadelphia High School. Through this experience, Jessica was exposed to obstacles faced by at-risk students on a daily basis, including food insecurity. As every first-year student at Penn is required to purchase a meal plan, and many students have unused meal swipes that would otherwise expire, Jessica co-founded Swipe Out Hunger, which allows students to donate the monetary value of unused meal swipes toward alleviating food insecurity within the Penn and West Philadelphia communities. To date, Swipe Out Hunger has provided funding for 40,000 meals, donated nearly 200 volunteer hours, and raised awareness about an issue that plagues 1 in 7 people nationally, 1 in 4 people in West Philadelphia, and nearly half of all college students. Jessica's experiences with Swipe Out Hunger inspired her capstone project, which examines the rise and evolution of America's public and private hunger response networks and the ways in which they can adapt to best meet the needs of food insecure individuals.

CAPSTONE PROJECT

THE RISE & EVOLUTION OF HUNGER RESPONSE IN AMERICA

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Since their emergence in the 1980s, food banks across the country have transformed from small, independent, community-run operations into complex organizations that move millions of pounds of food. In its infancy, this type of hunger response was provided on an “emergency” basis; however, as “emergency food” increasingly became a fundamental part of people’s diets, charitable organizations partnered with large scale government programs, food industry corporations and millions of volunteers. As the system grew, it evolved from a network of church basements to substantial institutions that provide food choice as well as programs intended to address poverty (a root cause of hunger) more specifically. This thesis explores the rise and evolution of food banks, how their development over the past forty years has allowed them to better meet the needs of food insecure individuals in the United States, and the limitations of their current efforts. Two case studies from Philadelphia are utilized to examine the issues. Specifically, this thesis concludes that high levels of food insecurity - despite increasing participation in both government and private safety net programs - indicate the necessity of a public/private hybrid; either model alone is less impactful than both models together. Moreover, growing emphasis on social enterprise to distribute food in a less regulated, more convenient, non-stigmatized manner represents an important growth area in hunger response.