



The University of Wisconsin – Madison Madison, Wisconsin Farming/Garden

SCHOOL

The University of Wisconsin – Madison. Our institution is a public, 4 year University. Undergraduate: 28, 897; Graduate: 9,538. Madison, Wisconsin.

ABSTRACT

Slow Food UW is a student organization and branch chapter of the national group, Slow Food USA. Slow Food UW focuses on promoting the merits of good, clean, fair food: good indicating the ingredients are healthy for both the consumer and the earth; clean indicating they are coming from natural, organic sources and are not plagued by chemicals; and fair meaning that they are fairly produced both by the farmers and the laborers, indicating that we should treat fairly the land and the hands that feed us. While Slow Food UW has several different projects within the organization, one of our newest projects is the Slow Food UW café. The café began in Spring 2011, located in a central location on campus in the building where the Slow Food UW offices are. Currently, we serve between 150-200 customers for lunch once a week on Wednesdays, between the hours of 11:30am and 2:00pm. The opening of the café for the upcoming fall semester is anticipated for late September. There are 11 interns that serve on the Café team, including chefs, suppliers, communications coordinators, and financial directors. Interns receive class credit for their work. The most recent financial analysis from the spring semester of 2012 reported a \$4,467.60 profit from a revenue \$6,644.06.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES

Goals

The Slow Food UW Café was an idea long before it was put into action. Officially beginning in late spring of 2011, the initial goals of the café were to expand options for students and the community when it came to what was available for lunch. We wanted to provide an affordable, healthy, local option that exposed students to unique combinations and varieties of foods, while educating them on the importance of buying and supporting local farmers. The specific goals set during the spring semester of 2011 were to open the café for a 6-week pilot



program. Per the success during these 6 weeks, we set a goal for opening for the entire fall semester, maintaining the once a week standard. The demand exceeded our expectations during the pilot run of the café, and the grand opening occurred in late September 2011. We stayed open every Wednesday for the remainder of the semester, and continue to run the café on a semester basis once a week during the

academic year (September – May). For the next 2-3 years, our main goals include expanding our sourcing to minority farmers in the Madison area, creating an efficient supplying system, and opening the café to 2 days a week. Ultimately, we would like to be able to have enough funding to pay a student intern or professional staff member so we are able to feasibly do multiple days of the café.

Accomplishments and Outcomes

We were able to achieve our goal of opening the café to the public community in September of 2011, after the pilot project in the spring. Our financial analysis from the fall 2011 semester showed a \$2,439.05 profit from a revenue of \$3,512.82. Based on the numbers from the spring, we were able to double our profit and revenue given the same time span (once a week throughout the spring semester). This indicates not only an increase in attendance, but also an increase in our team's efficiency both with re-using food scraps and purchasing in bulk. As our project continues to grow and succeed, the policies for purchasing food have been altered slightly to try and aim the sourcing at minority, low-income farmers in the south Madison region. Our café has moved to sourcing 100% locally, and trying to support social justice in the food system through their method of sourcing. This project has had a positive influence not only on the farmers and co-ops we support through our cafes, but also on the students and Madison community. Through our café, we have been able to educate people while they eat, spreading the word about local food, why it's worth eating, and where one can find it in Madison. Bite by bite, we hope to reach twice as many people this fall, and continue with our upward streak.

Challenges and Responses

A challenge early on was our methods of advertising. We needed to expand our base during the 6-week pilot program to prove our project was in demand, but with restrictions on advertising around campus, we found it easiest to spread the news via word of mouth. Since our café is located in the basement of a non-University building in the heart of campus, it was hard to attract passersby who were completely unaware of the Slow Food Café, as we didn't have signs or anything to indicate we were a restaurant at that time on Wednesdays. Responding to this in the fall, one of our interns created a sandwich board that stood outside on Wednesdays, enabling us to advertise more to the people passing by. However, our most consistent challenge is the time commitment that this sort of operation requires. Though students' receive credit for their work with the café, the task of maintaining the upkeep of a restaurant-certified kitchen and carrying out the weekly project of creating a unique, local menu, sourcing the ingredients, and preparing nearly 200 lunches is often much more time-consuming than 3 credits allow for. The major obstacle that prevents us from expanding into 2 days a week is the availability of our student interns. Running a restaurant is a full-time job, and we have to look into the possibility of paying students so they can take fewer credits or don't have to find work outside of our organization. This is the biggest change we are looking to implement moving forward.

Campus Climate Action: Your School's Carbon Footprint

By supporting local area farmers, our café project indirectly addresses the issue of emissions produced by the global food industry. When food has to travel from further away, more fossil fuels are used in the process of transporting the product from the producer to the consumer. Through our sourcing of local area farmers, we are reducing the amount of both the greenhouse gases and the carbon dioxide emissions that are expended in the process of food production.

Commentary and Reflection

If other student groups are interested in starting a student-run café, there are several preliminary steps they need to take. First and foremost, you will need an available kitchen and a dedicated team that includes at least two chefs, a produce supplier, a dry goods supplier, a financial bookkeeper, a marketing leader, and at least 5 volunteers to help prep the food and serve it. For sourcing local food, it is important to check the availability of local farmers' markets or local co-ops, and the options of buying in bulk. In terms of legalities, it is important to operate out of a licensed kitchen (Food and Drink permit from your city) and to obtain insurance. At least one member of the team should be ServSafe certified, which costs us around \$125 per person, and the certifications are typically held once a month in various cities throughout the state. The licenses may need to be obtained months in advance, so this is important to look into with your local city government. This will also mean that securing startup funds will be necessary. Purchasing insurance, renewing licenses and obtaining certifications can cost around \$1,200 in itself. As for getting started with the business, running a pilot program will give your team the best sense of what menu options work well, what sort of demand exists for the type of food, how items should be priced, how much revenue can be projected, and how much time is needed for planning a menu, sourcing ingredients, prepping the food and cleaning up. A pilot program can last 6 weeks (half of a semester) or 4 weeks (third of a semester), but I wouldn't recommend anything shorter than 4 weeks, as it won't give you a good sense of what the long-term project would entail. Once you have the necessary legal certifications, a licensed kitchen and staff, and a substantial amount of volunteers and good menu ideas, it's time to start cooking!

ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

Leaders and Supporters

Slow Food UW as an organization was really the foundation for the café project. Though our interns receive class credit for their work, it is all typically done as an independent study project within their individual majors. The café was initially started by a few key individuals, including Laura Peterson, Andrea Snow, Martina Kunovic, Sam Kanson-Benanav, and Danny Spitzberg. The former four were all undergraduate and graduate students who were directly involved with the pilot program of the café. Danny helped begin Slow Food UW as a student organization back in 2007, and served as an advisor for the café during this time. These individuals were the ones who decided the structure of the café, secured initial funding, set-up the shopping, prepping, and cleaning schedules, and secured a volunteer base during the first 6 weeks. They also planned menus, came up with the idea of comment cards, and set the tone for the café for the subsequent semesters. Since the fall, a few key individuals have included Amy Verhey, Ellie Jackson (financial director), Abigail Zielke (chef), Alaina Knief (supplier), and several other student interns who have helped with the various tasks associated with the café (cook interns, supplying interns, marketing interns, etc.). Amy and Ellie in particular have helped to streamline the café finances, develop a marketing and social media strategy, as well as stabilize the group with the student turnover from semester to semester and maintain the current structure. Though our student interns change often, the strong support from Slow Food UW as a whole has helped to maintain the café's success.

Funding and Resources

The café project was initially funded by some of the finances from Slow Food UW as well as a \$5,000 grant from the Oswald Foundation. Fortunately, the necessary resources (kitchen, equipment, dining hall) were granted to Slow Food UW by the Crossing, the building that our group operates out of. To compensate them for our use of the kitchen, we pay rent on a semester basis. In past semesters, we have paid around \$1,000 per, but we anticipate that to increase as our space usage increases. In

addition to these costs, we paid \$1,500 to secure a new fridge, \$100 to secure a freezer, \$125 per each certification of the café members, \$592 in an insurance policy, and around \$550 in food and drink permits from the Public Health department. Our base costs then were around \$3,867, not including the grant from the foundation. The grant was used to buy additional tables for seating and miscellaneous kitchen supplies. These costs also do not include the cost of food, which averaged around \$575 per week during the fall 2011 semester. We were not supported through a NWF Campus Ecology Fellowship, though our financial support from the Oswald and Slow Food UW was able to sustain the project through to the fall semester, when we first saw a substantial profit.

Education and Community Outreach

Our major outreach efforts involved the advertising outside our café location, as well as a pilot project during the summer of 2011 at the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra's Concerts on the Square to help promote the café. A former café intern piloted a program to serve picnic baskets at the event during the summer time, filled with information about both the basket and the café, then preceding its grand opening in September 2011. Fortunately, Slow Food UW had well-established programs outside of the café at this time, primarily including our Family Dinner Nights. Every Monday night during the academic year, we serve a locally sourced meal to around 100-120 students and community members for just \$5 a plate. Since this event became so well known amongst the foodie and environmental community on campus and in Madison, the café was frequently advertised at the dinner nights and became well attended by the local community. During this past academic year, we saw an increase in the number of University faculty and community members attending other than students, indicating a demand from both the student population as well as the rest of Madison.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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MORE ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL

The University of Wisconsin – Madison has a plethora of green initiatives and projects simultaneously occurring on campus. One other major project taking place is our student run garden on campus called F. H. King. F. H. King has a strong relationship with Slow Food UW as both projects support efforts to bring local, sustainable foods to campus and spread awareness of the importance of supporting local farmers. F. H. King employs many students and interns to help with the gardening efforts, provides food for Slow Food UW events and for students on campus, and helps with a city wide composting program to use sustainable materials in keeping their garden as natural and nutrient rich as possible. In addition, University Housing has helped plan many campus competitions between residence halls on campus to

reduce waste and energy usage. Projects such as these are co-hosted by student organizations such as WISPIRG (Wisconsin Student Public Interest Group).

We have also implemented many plans within our Facilities and Planning Management department to reduce energy usage and create more efficiency in our buildings. 'We Conserve' is one program that was created in 2006 by our Physical Plant division to help reduce our carbon footprint from building operations. Our newly launched Office of Sustainability is helping to coordinate efforts between student initiatives, educational outreach, and campus operations. The Office of Sustainability has a range of staff from differing departments on campus combining education and operations, as well as a team of students working on sustainable initiatives across campus. The website for the Office of Sustainability is www.Sustainability.wisc.edu.

Image Credit: Amy Verhey