



CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Hunger-Free & Basic Needs Strategic Plan

April 2024

Office of the President – Basic Needs

400 E University Way | Ellensburg WA 98926 | Office: 509-963-1857

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Executive Summary

Derived from realized need, HB 1559 was passed in 2023 to provide legislative investment to support college specific Hunger-Free and Basic Needs Campus Strategic Plans.

Central Washington University has crafted this strategic plan to implement long-term support systems to facilitate student success and well-being. Enhancing the visibility of resources and establishing structures that empower students with the autonomy to confidently meet their basic needs is crucial to our university.

CWU recognizes the pivotal role basic needs play in academic success and the overall well-being of students. Creating sustainable pathways for students to find basic need resources inspires students' self-confidence and strong autonomy for their futures.

The creation of this strategic plan aims to reevaluate, improve, and uplift the current systems in place at Central to ensure the holistic wellbeing of our Wildcats. It is crucial to acknowledge the multifaceted approach required to address basic needs. Centered in diversity, equity, and inclusion, this plan works towards creating transparency and reducing the stigma associated with basic needs assistance. By identifying and addressing the barriers students are faced with, we can work towards elevating our support systems. We worked with faculty, staff, and the student body to find what we as a university can do to improve our work towards basic need security and created strategic priorities that reflect our commitment to the needs of students. Each strategic priority integrates Central Washington Universities unified core values of student success, engagement, belonging and stewardship.

The Hunger-Free and Basic Needs Campus Strategic Plan reflects our university's unwavering commitment to the success and well-being of our students. Through establishing sustainable practices and pathways, this plan aligns with our university's vision of becoming a model learning community of equity and belonging.

Vision

Every Wildcat has access to consistent and accessible resources supporting their holistic well-being, fostering confidence in fulfilling their basic needs and ensuring personal, academic, and professional success.

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Basic Needs Programs and Practices at Central Washington University

Central Washington University has worked continuously to create long-term support systems that provide students with a variety of services that address their basic needs.

As our services expand, these resources work towards addressing food insecurity, housing insecurity, financial assistance, health services, and more.

Food

The Wildcat Pantry

The Wildcat Pantry, located in Brooks Library, is a free resource available to CWU students, staff, and faculty. They offer free food, hygiene products, household items, and free essential clothing. Outside of the pantry they offer programming to the Wildcat community surrounding essential resources, reducing basic needs insecurity stigma, and promote holistic well-being and success for all Wildcats.

Usage of the pantry has grown each quarter since opening in the fall of 2021. The Wildcat Pantry saw a 199% increase in the number of visits from fall quarter 2022 to fall quarter 2023. The program is supported by donations and a quarterly student fee assessed to each CWU-Ellensburg student.

Satellite Pantries

Several mini satellite locations exist across the Ellensburg campus. These locations are supported primarily due to the leadership and support of faculty and staff in those areas, the Wildcat Pantry supports as supply allows.

Wildcat Farm

The Wildcat Farm works to support education, community health, and environmental stewardship on campus by examining the social and ecological implications of our food system. The farm provides fresh produce for Dining Services and hosts community garden plots to practice self-sustenance and resilience through growing their own food.

Food Recovery

In collaboration with the Wildcat Pantry, CWU Dining operates the Food Recovery program at CWU. Unused meals from dining locations are recovered, repackaged, and then distributed to the Wildcat Pantry and their satellite locations around campus to provide free meals to the campus community.

Healthcare

Student Counseling Services

The SCS is a group of mental health counselors, psychologists, and doctoral/master's interns providing primary mental health care to the students at Central Washington University.

Student Health Services

The CWU Student Health Services strives to provide accessible, affordable, quality healthcare to

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the student body so they can achieve optimal physical and mental health and continue towards their academic goals.

Childcare

Early Childhood Learning Center

The Early Childhood Learning Center provides childcare and programming services to students, staff, and faculty at CWU. The ECLC serves children ages 4 weeks to 12 years old.

Housing

WSAC Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness Grant – House Bill 1559

The WSAC (Washington Achievement Council) SSEH Grant opportunity is overseen by the Basic Needs Resource Coordinator to provide students with emergency funding. Students who are experiencing financial hardships such as difficulty paying basic needs expenses can receive additional funding and support resources through this grant opportunity.

Wellbeing

Case Management

CWU's Office of Case Management identifies and connects with students experiencing obstacles to success and enhances holistic student wellness through assessment, support, and connections to various formal and informal resources. Case Managers work closely with students to provide long-term assistance during their time at CWU.

Disabilities Services

Disability Services serves students with permanent and temporary disabilities attending Central on the Ellensburg campus, online or at any of our eight University Centers. They work individually with students identifying barriers and providing accommodations to ensure equal access.

Office of Health Promotion

The Office of Health Promotion promotes positive health behaviors and supportive environments that inspires holistic health. Through providing education that centers around the 9 dimensions of wellness, the OHP creates a welcoming environment for students to interact with.

Career Services

Career Services is a comprehensive career counseling and resource center designed to engage students as active participants in their career development from first year through alumni. Career Services also operates the Professional Clothing Closet on campus, providing students with free professional clothing for interviews and future job prospects.

Additional Support Resources

Financial Aid Office

The Financial Aid Office provides students with professional support and guidance through the application process of federal aid, as well as other resources related to education costs.

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CWU Library

CWU Libraries currently offers several programs to assist students during their time at CWU. Students can checkout necessary electronics such as laptops, calculators, USB flash drives, and more. CWU Libraries also supports low- and no-cost course material adoptions and has plans to increase support services in this area over the coming years. In addition, the library is home to the Family Study space, an area filled with child-friendly furniture, a selection of circulating children's books, learning manipulatives, and creative play space.

Students Rights and Responsibilities

The Office of Student Rights & Responsibilities is responsible for educating students about their rights and responsibilities as members of the CWU community, upholding community standards, and implementing the Student Conduct Code.

CWU Financial Wellness

The Financial Wellness Center helps students foster a better relationship with money through financial education and literacy.

Basic Needs Resource Coordinator

The Basic Needs Resource Coordinator position at CWU provides a single point of contact for students to find resources assistance and referrals. The BNRC also oversees the WSAC SSEH grant opportunity for students facing financial hardships related to basic needs. Students can meet with the BNRC to find solutions and opportunities for assistance, including SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) assistance.

Community Partnerships

FISH

The FISH Food Pantry in Ellensburg makes nutritious food available five days a week. The Mobile Pantry brings food resources to underserved areas of Kittitas County including Roslyn and Kittitas. Their services also include SNAP assistance.

The Wildcat Pantry partners with FISH to provide the CWU community with additional staples such as fresh produce, dairy, deli, and bakery items, frozen meat, and shelf-stable pantry items.

APOYO

APOYO is a local food pantry and clothing bank located near the CWU Ellensburg campus. APOYO partners with Northwest Harvest to offer healthy, culturally relevant food to the Latino and Ellensburg community.

HopeSource

HopeSource is a local community resource that provides a variety of resources to the Ellensburg community, ranging from low-income housing opportunities to utility assistance.

Second Harvest

CWU has partnered with Second Harvest since spring of 2022, providing free grocery

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distribution to the CWU and Ellensburg community once an academic quarter during regular session.

Swipe Out Hunger

The Wildcat Pantry is an official campus partner with Swipe Out Hunger, working towards addressing student hunger. Swipe Out Hunger provides support, grants, and other resources applicable to the Wildcat Pantry.

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Basic Needs Security at Central Washington University

These basic needs-related surveys help provide an understanding of what students in our region are facing. Utilizing this information provided us with insight on what our programs are excelling at and where we can seek improvement as an institution.

WSAC Statewide Postsecondary Basic Needs Survey

According to the 2023 WSAC Survey, South Kittitas reported the highest rate of basic needs insecurity at 57.9%. In this, 566 CWU Wildcats responded, and we learned that:

- 47.2% of CWU students reported as facing food insecurity.
- 35% of CWU students reported as facing housing insecurity.
- 78% of students in the South-Central Region reported the inability to afford childcare.

Student Financial Wellness Survey

In collaboration with Trellis Strategies, CWU conducted a survey to gain a understanding of student finances and success in Fall 2023.

- 65% of students worry about having enough money to pay for school.
- 50% of students reported being food insecure.
- 44% of students reported being housing insecure.

Wildcat Pantry Survey

The Wildcat Pantry conducted a survey in 2023 for their shoppers regarding food insecurity and collected 57 responses. Over the course of this survey, we learned:

- A majority of students requested additional access to fresh produce.
- 64% of shoppers are employed
- 82% of shoppers were returning shoppers
- 77% of shoppers have faced limited access to basic needs resources in the past 30 days
- 100% of shoppers reported the pantry has improved their CWU experience.

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Barriers for Basic Needs Support

“...Basic needs insecurity is a structural issue, not an individual characteristic or shortcoming. People face basic needs insecurity when the “ecosystem” of support is not in place, not because of a personal decision or action.” (Henry& Beecher, 2021).

Systematic

Assistance Program Qualifications

State programs like SNAP assistance offer supplemental funding for students related to food insecurity. However, many students encounter challenges in navigating the application process and meeting eligibility criteria. Full-time enrolled students are eligible for SNAP if they work an average of 20 hours per week. Balancing part-time employment and academic commitments can be overwhelming for students facing demanding coursework.

Moreover, students who exceed the 20-hour work threshold to cover tuition and other basic needs often find themselves ineligible for assistance. As a result, the lengthy and overwhelming process deters students from applying and creates barriers in accessing SNAP benefits. To assist in alleviating some of these barriers, the Basic Needs Resource Coordinator and the Wildcat Pantry offer assistance to students throughout the SNAP application process.

Institutional

Capacity

The Wildcat Pantry currently employes one full-time staff and 60 hours of student staff per week. In July of 2024 (fiscal year 2025), Washington State funding will allow us to increase up to 100 hours of student staff employment per week. Current full-time staff capacity limits the ability of the pantry to holistically serve students with resource coordination & development, outreach, and programming. Increasing the number of student staff does partially fill the gap, this does not address the entire issue since student staff are limited in capacity and administrative permissions.

Funding capacity also limitations for Wildcat Pantry. Current funding does not allow for the pantry to offer enough variety of food products including cultural offerings, fresh produce, and dairy and meat products. Other funding gaps include emergency meal funds, inconsistently stocked satellite locations, inadequate cold storage, lack of proper last mile transportation, and funds to develop after hours resources access.

Lack of professional staff to assist students seeking basic needs assistance has created barriers in capacity for creating necessary basic needs programming. To provide CWU students with both the Ellensburg and our Center campuses requires more professional staff to ensure adequate outreach to students.

Financial Aid Limitation

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Cost of Attendance can create limitations on the amount of aid a student is eligible for in an academic year. Students who have met their COA are unable to receive additional funding, creating difficulties in emergency situations.

Resource Scarcity

Separated from large metropolitan areas, the resources available to the Ellensburg community are limited. Community resources are often exerted and underfunded, resulting in difficulties for students accessing basic needs resources. The absence of a year-round shelter poses difficulties for students in emergency situations like evictions and domestic violence. As a result, many on-campus students rely heavily on resources provided to students through the University. The absence of emergency shelters, medical aid, and other essential services creates barriers for both students and staff in providing adequate assistance.

Student-Focused

Stigma

Central Washington University offers many resources to assist students throughout their higher education journey. However, accessing these resources can be an intimidating task for students. The stigma associated with accessing food pantries and similar services often deters students from seeking assistance. Many students grapple with feelings of internalized shame when accessing government assistance or pantries, fearing judgment from their friends or others about their circumstances. Consequently, these students may not utilize the available resources, making it difficult to identify and provide individuals with the services they need and deserve. Programs like the Wildcat Pantry are actively working towards reducing the stigma students face accessing pantries. Thanks to these efforts, there has been an increase of support from the CWU community and higher rates of utilization from students.

Academic Schedule

Students often find themselves with limited time to access resources in the traditional 9-5 business hours. As a result, they rarely can connect with departments or access resources available.

*This list is not all encompassing of the struggles students face to access basic needs support but highlights the most common barriers faced by staff and students to access vital resources.

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Strategic Priorities Guiding Values

Our guiding principles fall in line with CWU's unified and core values. As we carry out this strategic plan, we emphasize the importance of integrating each value throughout our work.

Unified Value

Student Success

Central Washington University creates pathways for students of all backgrounds to reach their academic and professional goals. Through providing a supportive learning environment, faculty and staff inspire students to become engaged professionals, active citizens, and lifelong learners.

Core Values

Engagement

Central Washington University nurtures authentic relationships built on mutual respect, responsibility, and reciprocity. Our various communities engage in a network of mutuality and interdependence to advance collective learning and growth.

Belonging

Central Washington University believes that a diversity of peoples, cultures, and ideas are essential to learning, discovery, and creativity. Collectively, we take responsibility for welcoming and integrating diverse perspectives into our community to advance our vision and mission.

Stewardship

Central Washington University advances environmental, social, and economic sustainability in ways that support an ecologically healthy and socially just world and that honor the Indigenous peoples who have resided here since time immemorial and who continue to reside here. We nurture our internal talent through professional development opportunities, coaching and mentoring, and accountability enacted with care and compassion.

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Strategic Priority #1: Strengthen existing support resources for CWU students.

Goal 1: Address and mitigate housing insecurity of CWU students.

Tactic: Develop ongoing educational programming surrounding housing literacy.

Tactic: Identify and establish emergency housing locations for students' immediate needs.

Tactic: Establish a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Central Washington University and HopeSource by Spring 2025 to enhance housing and assistance options for students. Aiming to streamline resource assistance, ensuring students receive timely and efficient support.

Tactic: Evaluate and report to WSAC the impact of the WSAC SSEH grant opportunity. Including the impact it has on students related to retention, housing assistance, and overall wellbeing.

Goal 1 KPI: The success of goal 1 will be measured through establishing housing programming material and emergency housing locations listed that are accessible to students.

Goal 2: Address and take steps to eradicate food insecurity at CWU.

Tactic: Increase the number of individual's using the Wildcat Pantry by 50% by the end of June 2025 based on 2023-2024 usage.

Tactic: Offer a variety of whole and prepared foods in the Wildcat Pantry in the following categories: Hispanic Cuisine, Asian Cuisine, Kosher, Hallal, and the five most common allergens in the US by Spring 2025.

Tactic: Establish at-cost grocery options in collaboration with campus partners such as CWU Dining and Academic Departments by 2027. Offerings should include household staples such as dairy, meat, fresh produce, and grains.

Tactic: Develop and implement educational opportunities for future self-sufficiency, including farming, cooking, and grocery shopping by Spring 2025.

Tactic: Offer short term emergency hot meal options by Winter 2024.

Tactic: Create and implement a 5-year plan for the Wildcat Pantry by Fall 2024.

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Tactic: Explore the implementation of EBT accessibility at CWU Dining locations by Fall 2025.

Tactic: Implement online ordering in the Wildcat Pantry by Winter 2026.

Tactic: Implement refrigerated food locker system operated by the Wildcat Pantry by Spring 2026.

Tactic: Establish four satellite locations operated by the Wildcat Pantry in unique and high trafficked areas of the Ellensburg campus by Spring 2025.

Goal 2 KPI: The success of goal 2 will be measured through the Wildcat Pantry Quarterly Impact Reports, online ordering pilot, and accessible marketing to students through online platforms.

Goal 3: Increase transportation offerings needed to navigate the CWU campus, Ellensburg community, and surrounding region.

Tactic: Explore opportunities for collaboration between existing departments and CWU Parking Services to provide discounted or reduced cost parking for eligible students.

Tactic: Collaborate with Central Transit to offer updated routes and market Central Transit services to the CWU community.

Goal 3 KPI: The success of goal 3 will be measured through the collaboration with Central Transit and the investigation of reduced or discounted parking for students.

Goal 4: Increase students' access to technology required to be academically successful.

Tactic: Increase visibility and accessibility of on campus technology support available at CWU through digital marketing and campus resource guides.

Tactic: Identify internet connectivity programs for affordable internet access.

Tactic: Create sustainable pathways for technology rentals for students located in center locations by Fall 2025.

Goal 4 KPI: The success of goal 4 will be measured through the implementation of online resources for affordable internet programs and marketing campaigns for technology rentals.

Goal 5: Expand access to affordable healthcare options that support CWU students' wellbeing.

Tactic: Collaborate with existing healthcare providers to streamline access to resources for CWU students.

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Tactic: Increase visibility and accessibility of current mental health support resources available at CWU through digital resources.

Tactic: Expand healthcare education through ongoing programming and collaboration. Including assistance in healthcare enrollment.

Goal 5 KPI: The success of goal 5 will be measured through establishing clear pathways of communication and collaboration between CWU and affordable healthcare resources in the Ellensburg community.

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Strategic Priority #2: Ensure all CWU Students have equitable access to resources that support their holistic well-being and success.

Goal 1: Strengthen community partnerships and collaboration to meet students' basic needs.

Tactic: Expand Faculty and Staff information and outreach regarding basic needs awareness through quarterly training and the implementation of required statement on faculty syllabi.

Tactic: Establish partnerships between existing CWU satellite locations and local community colleges to expand outreach and visibility of resources to students.

Goal 1 KPI: The success of goal 1 will be measured by self-assessment based on the number of implemented marketing and outreach. In addition to conducting an annual faculty focused feedback survey on the impact basic needs outreach has had.

Goal 2: Create and Implement a Basic Needs Resource Hub plan by 2025.

Tactic: Establish a central location on the CWU-Ellensburg campus and CWU website for students to access and/or learn about basic needs resources in the form of a basic needs center or hub.

Tactic: Establishing a subcommittee from the Wildcat Essentials Coalition to identify prospective locations for a basic needs center, including existing spaces available on campus.

Goal 2 KPI: The success of goal 2 will be measured by the implementation of the subcommittee and identified prospective locations, including an established webpage, goals, and timelines.

Goal 3: Address systemic issues by broadening community awareness surrounding basic needs initiatives.

Tactic: Implementation of digital workshops and resources, targeting students attending center locations.

Tactic: Launch a long-term marketing campaign focused on educating students regarding housing literacy. This includes distributing material to high traffic areas in the CWU campus at the end of the 2024- 2025 academic year.

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Goal 3 KPI: The success of goal 3 will be measured through the various marketing campaigns, materials, and programming created in collaboration with the Provost to Center locations.

Strategic Priority #3: Create sustainable infrastructure for basic needs initiatives at CWU.

Goal 1: Implement sustainable funding models for basic needs initiatives.

Tactic: Identify consistent source(s) of funding for basic needs initiatives on campus. Including the expansion of the CWU Basic Needs Fee.

Tactic: Realign “PUSH” foundation account to encompass all basic needs, including renaming the account to assist in donor recognition.

Tactic: Evaluate, realign, and collaborate with individual departments to broaden resource accessibility for basic needs. Including outreach and gathering feedback on barriers hindering students' access to resources.

Goal 1 KPI: The success of goal 1 will be measured through self-assessment and the expansion of Basic Needs related funding.

Goal 2: Align University infrastructure to support long term basic needs programs and initiatives.

Tactic: Create a streamlined and formalized system for students to find and access resources through ongoing marketing and campus partnerships.

Tactic: Create greater ease of access for students to access basic needs resources by establishing an in-person centralized location for resource assistance.

Tactic: Reduce structural and programmatic barriers for students to easily identify and access Basic Needs staff and spaces through self-evaluations

Goal 2 KPI: The success of goal 2 will be measured through the assessment and evaluation of current systems at CWU through ongoing student feedback surveys.

Goal 3: Expand online resource support for students.

Tactic: Implementation of a digital comprehensive resource database to be launched during the 2025 academic year.

Tactic: Launch a centralized webpage for student eligible grants, creating transparency and removing barriers of finding emergency funding.

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Goal 3 KPI: The success of goal 3 will be measured through the creation of the basic needs database and self-evaluation from the Wildcat Essentials Coalition.

Strategic Priority	Legislation
Address Basic Needs Insecurities of Students	A, D, F
Equitable Access to resources	D, E
Sustainable infrastructure	B, D

Accountability

The established KPI's give us the opportunity to evaluate our work as an institution to support students.

The Basic Needs Resource Coordinator will conduct annual summer outreach to the various departments on-campus related to their participation in basic needs, aligning with goal 1.3 and 3.1 of our university strategic plans. This outreach will provide insight on current work related to basic needs and information on what gaps are missing related resource knowledge.

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Conclusion

This strategic plan emphasizes our institution's commitment to the supporting the holistic wellbeing of our students. It is a collective effort from the CWU community to create a supportive environment where students feel confident in finding success in their higher education journey. In line with our university's vision and mission, these strategic priorities create a guide for our community, emphasizing the importance of basic needs support at CWU. In creating sustainable programming and resources, we can create a campus where every Wildcat can thrive holistically.

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