

Master of Public Health

Applied Practice Experience

by

Jessica Marie Ramirez

MPH Candidate

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Graduate Committee:

Linda Yarrow, PhD, RDN, LD, CDCES

Ellyn R. Mulcahy, Ph.D., MPH

Carol Shanklin, PhD

Applied Practical Experience Site:

The 'Cats Cupboard, March 2023-December 2024

Alternative Breaks Program, November 2024-January 2025

Rural Grocery Initiative, June 2022-August 2023

SNAP Outreach at Kansas State University Initiative, March 2024-January 2025

Applied Practical Experience Preceptor:

Shelly Williams

Tamara Bauer, EdD

Leah Tsoodle, PhD

Kara Ross, PhD

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

Manhattan, Kansas

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Chapter 1 - Portfolio Products

My Applied Practical Experience (APE) was composed of four distinct yet interconnected experiences, each contributing to my broader understanding of food security, systems thinking, and public health advocacy. As Co-chair of the advisory board for Cats' Cupboard, the on-campus food pantry, I facilitated meetings, led sub-committees focused on funding decisions, and worked to expand the pantry's services to include faculty and staff. I also provided direct service by stocking shelves, assisting students with food selection, and administering emergency food vouchers. In Garden City, Kansas, I served as the site leader for an *Alternative Breaks* program, guiding students through immersive experiences at Catholic Charities, Tyson Foods, the Brookover feedlot, and the Kansas Food Bank. Through these visits, we explored the intersections of immigration, food production, and labor, using systems thinking tools to connect our experiences to broader food insecurity challenges. In my role as a research assistant with the *Rural Grocery Initiative* and the *Kansas Healthy Food Initiative*, I co-led data collection for a statewide survey on rural grocery stores, analyzed qualitative interviews with grocers and farmers, and developed public-facing reports to inform food policy and community planning. Finally, I played a key role in developing an on-campus *SNAP outreach program*, collaborating with agricultural economists, extension agents, and policymakers to secure funding and create a strategic plan for implementation. Across these four experiences, I engaged in both direct service and systemic analysis, applying public health principles to address food insecurity at multiple levels.

The products I completed during these experiences reflect several of the Master of Public Health Foundational Competencies. For *Cats Cupboard*, I developed educational materials, including brochures and flyers, to raise awareness about food insecurity on campus and promote the pantry's services among faculty, staff, and students, as well as reports on subcommittee decisions to inform the advisory board and broader campus community. For the *Alternative Breaks* program in Garden City, I created a blog post focusing on systems thinking and how we can make sense of our experiences, along with presentation slides that included photos from our site visits and guiding questions for our debrief session. My research with the *Rural Grocery Initiative* and *Kansas Healthy Food Initiative* resulted in a co-authored non-academic article highlighting key insights into rural food access. Lastly, for the *SNAP Outreach Program*, I am providing the final draft of the grant proposal that secured funding for the

initiative, along with social media content designed to promote the program as we work toward its full implementation at Kansas State University.

Table 1.1 Summary of Portfolio Products

Portfolio Product		Description
1	Subcommittee and Board Reports	Compiled reports on funding decisions and strategic initiatives, decisions related to the revision of the pantry's mission and vision statements to inform the advisory board and the broader campus community.
2	Blog Post on Systems Thinking	Reflected on our experiences in Garden City, using systems thinking to analyze food insecurity, migration, and labor dynamics.
3	Co-Authored Practice Article	Contributed to a publication highlighting key insights into rural food access, the challenges faced by grocers, and conducted a comparative analysis of a similar report from 2008 to 2021.
4	Final Draft of Grant Proposal	Developed and refined the grant proposal that successfully secured funding for the SNAP Outreach Program at Kansas State University, in collaboration with agricultural economists and a nutrition specialist from Research and Extension.
5	Social Media Content for SNAP Outreach program	Created posts for future use to promote the SNAP Outreach Program and increase awareness among students about available resources.

Table 1.2 Portfolio Products and Competency Addressed

Deliverables	Number and Competency Addressed	
Subcommittee and Board Reports	16	Apply principles of leadership, governance and management, which include creating a vision, empowering others, fostering collaboration and guiding decision making
Blog Post on Systems Thinking	22	Apply systems thinking tools to a public health issue
Co-Authored Non-Academic Article	3	Analyze quantitative and qualitative data using biostatistics, informatics, computer-based programming and software, as appropriate
Final Draft of Grant Proposal	9	Design a population-based policy, program, project or intervention
Social Media Content for SNAP Outreach program	6	Discuss the means by which structural bias, social inequities and racism undermine health and create challenges to achieving health equity at organizational, community and societal levels

Chapter 2 - Competencies

Table 2.1 Summary of MPH Foundational Competencies

Number and Competency		Description
9	Design a population-based policy, program, project, or intervention	I contributed to the development of multiple food security initiatives, including the expansion of <i>'Cats Cupboard</i> services, the <i>Alternative Breaks Program</i> , the <i>Rural Grocery Initiative</i> , and the <i>SNAP Outreach Program</i> , ensuring each was designed to address systemic barriers to food access.
22	Apply systems thinking tools to a public health issue	I used systems thinking frameworks, such as process mapping and causal loop diagrams, to analyze the interconnected factors influencing food insecurity in university, rural, and agricultural settings.
16	Apply principles of leadership, governance and management, which include creating a vision, empowering others, fostering collaboration and guiding decision making	I took on leadership roles in all four experiences including facilitating meetings, coordinating site visits, managing collaborations with stakeholders, and guiding decision-making processes to advance food security efforts.
6	Discuss the means by which structural bias, social inequities and racism undermine health and create challenges to achieving health equity at organizational, community and societal levels	I addressed structural barriers to food access by advocating for the destigmatization of food assistance, analyzing inequities in rural food systems, and developing outreach strategies to increase SNAP enrollment among historically marginalized students.
3	Analyze quantitative and qualitative data using biostatistics, informatics, computer-based programming and software, as appropriate	I collected, analyzed, and synthesized qualitative and quantitative data across my projects, using statistical software, survey analysis, and stakeholder insights to inform program development and policy recommendations.

Competency 9 – Throughout my Applied Practical Experience (APE), I applied Competency 9 by designing and contributing to multiple initiatives that address food insecurity at both the campus and community levels. As Co-chair of the 'Cats Cupboard Advisory Board, I played a central role in improving food access by advocating for the expansion of the pantry's services to faculty and staff, a policy shift aimed at addressing food insecurity beyond just students. This effort required assessing the needs of the campus community, gathering stakeholder input, and developing materials to reduce stigma and promote awareness. In Garden City, I facilitated the Alternative Breaks Program, where I designed reflective learning experiences that helped students engage with complex food system issues. By integrating systems thinking tools, I guided students in making connections between immigration, labor, and food insecurity, effectively turning this program into an intervention that deepened their understanding of systemic challenges.

My work with the Rural Grocery Initiative and Kansas Healthy Food Initiative involved designing research-driven strategies to support rural food systems, including analyzing statewide data to inform policy and program recommendations that address food access barriers. Lastly, my role in developing the SNAP Outreach Program was a direct application of this competency, as I collaborated with stakeholders to design and secure funding for a targeted intervention that will increase student access to federal nutrition assistance benefits. Across all four experiences, I engaged in program and policy design, using data, stakeholder engagement, and strategic planning to create or enhance initiatives that address food insecurity in meaningful and sustainable ways.

Competency 22 – I consistently applied systems thinking throughout my Applied Practical Experience (APE) to analyze the complexities of food insecurity and develop targeted interventions. As Co-chair of the 'Cats Cupboard Advisory Board, I used systems thinking to assess how multiple factors—such as stigma, financial constraints, and policy barriers—affected students' and staff members' access to food. This perspective guided our efforts to expand pantry services and create educational materials that addressed underlying barriers to food access. In Garden City, I led the Alternative Breaks Program, where I structured reflective learning sessions to help students use systems thinking to connect their site visits—including Tyson Foods, the Brookover feedlot, and Kansas Food Bank—to broader issues of immigration, labor, and the food supply chain. We explored causal loops, recognizing how labor policies, economic conditions, and agricultural practices interact to shape food insecurity. In my research role with the Rural Grocery Initiative and Kansas Healthy Food Initiative, I applied systems

mapping to analyze the relationship between rural grocery stores, supply chain disruptions, and local food access. By examining how store closures impacted surrounding communities, I contributed to policy recommendations that considered both economic and social determinants of food security.

Lastly, in designing the SNAP Outreach Program, I applied process mapping to outline the steps needed for implementation, identifying key stakeholders and potential bottlenecks in the system to ensure efficiency and accessibility for students. Across all four experiences, I used systems thinking tools—including causal loop diagrams, process mapping, and stakeholder analysis—to break down complex public health challenges and develop more effective, sustainable solutions.

Competency 16 – I applied leadership, governance, and management principles in various capacities to advance food security initiatives. As Co-chair of the 'Cats Cupboard Advisory Board, I facilitated meetings, guided subcommittees focused on funding allocation and worked to expand pantry services to include faculty and staff. This required building consensus among board members, advocating for policy changes, and ensuring that resources were managed effectively to meet the needs of the campus community. In Garden City, I led the Alternative Breaks Program, where I facilitated meaningful participation and reflection among students, ensuring they engaged critically with issues of food insecurity and labor. I served as the on-site point of contact for our team back in Manhattan and for our community partners, maintaining clear communication and logistical coordination throughout the trip. After returning, I assisted in submitting funding receipts, ensuring financial accountability for the program. My work with the Rural Grocery Initiative and Kansas Healthy Food Initiative involved managing research processes, collaborating with a research team, and helping organize data collection efforts to assess rural food access challenges. This required effective teamwork and communication to ensure accuracy and relevance to the findings.

Finally, I spearheaded the development of the SNAP Outreach Program as the lead student collaborator, working with individuals I had never met before and one colleague I had only worked with virtually prior to this project. Our team comes from diverse fields—including agricultural economics, public health, and social services—requiring me to navigate different perspectives and expertise to drive the initiative forward. My role included securing funding, aligning stakeholder priorities, and ensuring that the program was both data-driven and responsive to student needs. Across these experiences, I applied leadership principles by fostering collaboration, guiding decision-making processes, and managing resources to implement impactful public health initiatives.

Competency 6 – Throughout my Applied Practical Experience (APE), I actively engaged with structural biases and social inequities that contribute to food insecurity at multiple levels. As Co-chair of the ‘Cats Cupboard Advisory Board, I worked to address the stigma surrounding food insecurity by advocating for the expansion of pantry services to include faculty and staff, recognizing that food insecurity affects a broader population beyond students. I also developed educational materials to normalize the use of food assistance, ensuring that messaging was inclusive and destigmatizing. During the Alternative Breaks Program in Garden City, I facilitated discussions on the systemic factors that shape food insecurity, including immigration policies, labor exploitation, and economic disparities. By guiding students through reflective sessions, I helped them analyze how structural inequities disproportionately affect immigrant and low-income communities working in food production. As the on-site point of contact, I maintained strong communication with local partners, ensuring that our engagement was respectful and aligned with community needs.

Additionally, I assisted in the financial reconciliation process by submitting funding receipts upon returning to Manhattan. My work with the Rural Grocery Initiative and Kansas Healthy Food Initiative further deepened my understanding of how structural inequities manifest in rural food systems. I analyzed qualitative and quantitative data to identify barriers rural grocers and farmers face in maintaining food access, particularly in low-income communities. Finally, as the student spearheading the SNAP Outreach Program, I worked alongside a team from diverse fields—including agricultural economics, public health, and social services—to address systemic barriers preventing students from accessing federal nutrition benefits. Many students, particularly those from historically marginalized backgrounds, struggle with eligibility requirements and bureaucratic challenges. I collaborated with stakeholders to design a program that would simplify the application process and increase access to resources. Across these experiences, I applied a structural lens to food insecurity, recognizing and addressing the social, economic, and policy-driven inequities that contribute to health disparities.

Competency 3 – Throughout my Applied Practical Experience (APE), I utilized both qualitative and quantitative data analysis to inform public health decision-making and advocacy efforts. As Co-chair of the ‘Cats Cupboard Advisory Board, I worked with pantry leadership to analyze usage data, identifying trends in food assistance needs among students and faculty. This data was instrumental in advocating for policy changes and ensuring that the pantry’s resources were allocated efficiently. During the Alternative Breaks Program in Garden City, I applied qualitative analysis by guiding students through reflective discussions that connected their direct experiences to broader systemic issues. Additionally, I documented key insights from

our site visits, which later informed a blog post on systems thinking in food security. In my role with the Rural Grocery Initiative and Kansas Healthy Food Initiative, I engaged in more advanced data analysis by co-leading the collection and processing of a statewide survey on rural grocery stores. I worked extensively with software such as SPSS, R, and Excel to clean, code, and analyze both quantitative survey responses and qualitative interview data.

One of my key tasks involved verifying rural grocery store listings by systematically calling each store to confirm operational status, then compiling that information into a comprehensive database that contributed to statewide food access mapping. Finally, as the lead student collaborator on the SNAP Outreach Program, I used data from national and state-level reports to perform a gap analysis, identifying how many students on campus would likely qualify for benefits but were not enrolled. I also helped integrate these findings into the grant proposal, strengthening our case for funding by demonstrating the scope of student food insecurity. Across these experiences, I applied data analysis skills to assess food security needs, inform program development, and advocate for sustainable public health interventions.