SWSA Sponsors Culturally Diverse Food Drive

Ed Day

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When many of us think of food drives, we think of dusty cans of tomato paste, lima beans and pickled herring alongside boxes of mac and cheese and some heavily salted pasta kits that are meant to “help” a variety of meats.

Social Work Student Association (SWSA) president Basia Minta hopes to shake the stereotype of food drives that gather “processed American crap.” SWSA is sponsoring a culturally diverse food drive by encouraging people to step out of their own pantries and really think about what people eat.

“SWSA is initiating this food drive in respect and in honor of our peers and friends with diverse backgrounds,” Minta said. “It doesn’t seem fair to expect our friends to eat certain foods they are not familiar with or don’t like.”

It is not simply a matter of personal preference. According to said Sue Fust, coordinator of the Student Parent Center, food security is a big issue at Metropolitan State. “Many of our students, even if they have learned to eat and enjoy it when prepared by other, do not know how to cook American food at home,” Fust said.

The definition of a “comfort food” varies between the diverse ethnic groups represented at Metro State. For Native American, Asian, African and Latino students, comfort foods could include wild rice, fish paste, dried dates, fufu flour, nopalitos and masa.

Another key distinction of this food drive is that students may donate perishable foods such as meat. In fact, hunters may donate pheasant and deer meat that has been properly prepared and packaged, Minta said. However, perishable foods may only be donated in person between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m. at the Food For Thought office.

Nonperishable items can be dropped in six bins around campus at any time from Sunday, Nov. 15 to Saturday afternoon, Nov. 21. Collection boxes will be placed at the Student Senate office, the Social Work department, the Food for Thought office, the Library and Learning Center, the cafeteria, the Gateway Student Services Center, and the Student Center.

“[An ethnic food drive] meets a need,” said Philip Fuehrer, interim director of student development. Fuehrer noted that last year the student senate allocated $500 to purchase Asian and African foods for the campus food pantry to meet demand.

Besides the obvious goal of collecting food, raising awareness of how others live is an important component of the drive. Something as simple as rice can reflect differences in cultures. The seasoned or precooked varieties that can be heated quickly reflect American culture, whereas basmati rice, which originated in India, takes longer to cook. Basmati rice is generally cooked in large batches for large gatherings.

Although she occasionally criticizes processed food, Minta supports all food drives. “As future social workers, we wish to seek out new opportunities to grow and promote diversity,” Minta said. She hopes that this one might get people out of their comfort zones and maybe take a look at the ethnic aisles in the grocery store, possibly for their first time.

“We have a diverse campus,” Minta added.