For the past four years, the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh (UWO) has participated in Feeding America, a nation-wide partnership with various organizations all aimed at the fight to end hunger. According to the USDA, in 2015, 13.1 million children lived in food insecure households and African-American and Latino food insecure households more than doubled Caucasian households. Feeding America provides these populations with access to healthy and nutritious foods. A network of food banks supplies food pantries, food programs, and mobile food trucks, to serve families, children, and others that are at risk of hunger.

In November of 2012, some UWO coaches volunteered at a mobile food pantry in the City of Oshkosh and witnessed the need for nutritious foods in the area. Later that year, the UWO football team fundraised $1,500 and did another mobile food pantry before Christmas of 2012. While it was a very successful event, the event was somewhat hampered by 12 inches of falling snow.

The athletics department goal changed as they decided to hold the event twice a year - at Easter and during the December holidays. Additionally, all sport programs participated in the event and mobile pantries became available on the UWO campus inside Kolf Sports Center. Since 2013, UWO has hosted two mobile pantries a year increasing its efforts from $1,500 to $3,000 worth of food. Any leftover food goes directly to other food pantries in the city.

Now, Feeding America is an entire athletics department and student-athlete driven event. Last December, the football team, 80 other student-athletes, coaches, administrators, faculty, Lourdes Academy (a local high school), and other Oshkosh community members logged over 500 service hours and fed over 390 families from all over Wisconsin.

This year UWO received a generous $5,000 donation from the local Kiwanis Club. This December will be a record high $10,000 event with two semi-trailer trucks, and over 50,000 pounds of food, which has exceeded UWO’s previous goal of at least 25,000 pounds of food.

Feeding America educates and brings awareness to coaches, administrators, student-athletes, and community members about the current food crisis in America. Hunger is a nation-wide problem that is prevalent in all communities. It is important to also recognize and acknowledge that while hunger is a universal problem, people that are in historically lower-income communities, such as African-Americans and Latino, are at higher risk of food insecurity. By tackling hunger in America, we are also addressing issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and many things that define us as a people, community, and a nation.

For their efforts in participating in Feeding America, the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh is this month’s Diversity Spotlight Initiative recipient.