

# From Limited Ingredients to Delish Meals: Process of SLU Campus Kitchens Project

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My documentary project about the club initiative in St. Lawrence University unfolds the working process of the Campus Kitchen Project, advocating for food insecurity in a local area, Canton, New York. My goal was to showcase the behind-the-scenes efforts of the club members and highlight their work, offering a more detailed understanding of the initiative. I approached the film with a participatory and observational documentary style, positioning the camera as an active participant in the club's activities. Inspired by Cinéma Vérité, I applied improvisation and handheld cameras during the production process.

**Keywords:** cinéma vérité; food insecurity; student initiative; handheld camera; participatory mode

YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/zUtHnrwIXhY?si=1uqXX3L1XVRHk60E>

“From Limited Ingredients to Delish Meals: Process of SLU Campus Kitchen Project” is my documentary project for Film and Media Action. This project started out of my passion for spreading the word about the club I lead on campus. The issue of food insecurity may sound familiar, but people often can't picture the volunteering work that goes into it. The food insecurity issue sounds familiar, but people cannot picture the volunteering work that has been put on. Campus Kitchen Project (CKP) is a St. Lawrence University student-initiative advocating for food insecurity in a local area, Canton, New York, started in 2010. Food insecurity is an ongoing issue in the United States, where many people lack access to nutritious food or food supplies due to various factors such as low income and geographic location. CKP contributes more than 15 hours into this club each week to serve more than 80 meals and prepare snacks for local school children. Film and media are powerful tools for storytelling and spreading awareness, so I chose to create my documentary on this club. I believe it will be an effective way to inform people

on campus about the club's dedication.

Inspired by Cinéma Vérité, truthful and sincere storytelling is my priority as a filmmaker. The Cinéma Vérité movement fascinates me in a way of capturing a realism story with real settings, natural acting, and unscripted storylines. Some cinematic characteristics of this filmmaking style include handheld camera, natural lighting, and minimal edits which I applied to my documentary. *Big Wata* (2018) directed by Gugi van der Velden utilizes the style of realistic filmmaking. They usually capture the moments with handheld camera movement with clear voice over sound of the social actors. It makes the storytelling very authentic and convincing that we are actually following them through their journey. Moreover, the TV show named *The Bear* (2022) inspired me in an aspect of the kitchen scenes and the use of chaotic ambience. These two references informed some of the artistic choices in my project.

In the production process, I approached the film with a participatory and observational documentary style, positioning the camera as an active participant in the club's activities. I started off my project

by asking for filming contents from people in the club back in October 2024. My production process took around a month. Each week, I followed different shifts to film interviews, A-roll footage, and B-roll footage. My camera movement was consistently handheld, with static shots only used for studio interview setups. By interacting with club members through the camera, I was able to make them feel more natural and relaxed, which was my goal.

In post-production, the challenge was to shape the footage into a coherent narrative. Given the Cinéma Vérité approach, most of the footage and interview questions on the set were improvised. By staying true to the original goal of the documentary—to highlight the members’ contributions and the process of the Campus Kitchen Project—I structured the film as a week-by-week diary of their work. The film opens with a powerful speech from one of the club members, overlaid with B-roll foot-

age, and then transitions into scenes of their regular shifts. It concludes with a brief overview of the club’s mission and its vision for growth.

This documentary project gave me an opportunity to integrate my passion in filmmaking and the advocacy for the local community. Using a cinema to shed light on the issue of food insecurity and the role of the Campus Kitchen Project in addressing it has been a rewarding aspect of this documentary experience.

### **Bibliography**

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