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USC gets real life look at poverty

Organizations simulate global economic structure with hunger banquet

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About 200 USC students gathered in the Russell House Thursday night to better understand world hunger and poverty at the Oxfam Hunger Banquet.

"It's a dramatization of the way food is distributed in the world," said Kat Heavner, a third-year English student and director of special programs for Carolina Service Council (CSC), Carolina Productions and Amnesty International sponsored the event.

"A lot of people feel separated from hunger and poverty," Heavner said.

She hoped the banquet would help students become aware and empowered.

Students were distributed into three groups: high income, middle income and low income, each proportional to current global wealth distribution.

Food was given to each group according to world hunger distribution.

The high-income group, which is 10 percent of the human population, had a nutritional meal served to them.

The meal included chicken, macaroni and cheese, green beans, salad, bread, cake and tea.

"I felt kind of guilty," said Tracey Desjadon, a social work graduate student placed in the high-income group.

She also felt the demonstration was pretty good percentage-wise.

The middle income group, 25 percent, stood in line for rice, beans and water, with men being served first.

The low-income group, 60 percent, had a bucket of water and rice to share within their groups.

"One little bowl of rice was not filling at all," said Jeremy Smith, a fourth-year marine science student.

Many students found the average income per capita in each of the economic groups startling.

"I was surprised at how low the per capita income was for the high-income class," said Katie Hendricks, a fourth-year accounting and international business student.

The average annual income per capita for the high class was more than \$9,000 and the average income for the low class was \$2.50 per day, or \$912.

David Simmons, USC professor of anthropology and public health, gave statistics on global hunger and poverty and described scenarios of people who move from class to class.

"Everyone on the Earth has the same basic needs," Simmons said. He explained how the circumstances a person is born into affect the class in which a person is placed.

"Equality in this world does not exist," Simmons said.

Simmons also explained how poverty and hunger isn't segmented by country.

"Hunger and poverty are everywhere, even in the U.S." Simmons said. Thirty million Americans go hungry, he said.

Heavner said there are solutions. Such solutions included increasing exports across the globe along with awareness.

"[Student presence] shows that you are concerned, want to learn more and want to make a difference," Heavner said.



Media Credit: Kelly Bobrow

Those students in the lowest-income group were given a pot of rice to share on the floor as a group.



Media Credit: Kelly Bobrow

Students who were placed in the middle-income group at Thursday's Hunger Banquet had to wait in line for beans and rice, with the men being served first.