UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Global Food Initiative

Global Food Initiative: Food and Housing Security at the University of California

Executive Summary
December 2017

This report was made possible by funding from the University of California (UC) Office of the President Global Food Initiative. The University of California Global Food Initiative addresses one of the critical issues of our time: how to sustainably and nutritiously feed a world population expected to reach eight billion by 2025. By building on existing efforts and creating new collaborations among UC's 10 campuses, affiliated national laboratories and the Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources, the Global Food Initiative is working to develop and export solutions for food security, health and sustainability throughout California, the United States and the world. For more information, visit: www.ucop.edu/global-food-initiative.

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Executive Summary

Meeting the basic needs of food and housing security is a multidimensional challenge for communities across the country and one that higher education also faces. Today expenses other than tuition can account for more than 60 percent of the total cost of attending a college or university. Over the past four decades, the cost of living for college students has increased by over 80 percent.[1]

The University of California is dedicated to ensuring the success of its more than 260,000 students and as such, has embarked on a comprehensive effort to assess and help solve the basic needs challenges its students experience. To that end, this report builds on the 2015 Student Food Access and Security Survey (SFASS) and the findings from the 2016 Student Food Access and Security Study where 48 percent of the university's undergraduates and 25 percent of its graduate students experience some level of food insecurity. The report, "Global Food Initiative: Food and Housing Security at the University of California," provides information on the university's latest data collection efforts and strategies for addressing basic needs security.

UC Global Food Initiative targets food security

The Global Food Initiative (GFI) was launched in 2014 to address one of the critical issues of our time: how to sustainably and nutritiously feed a world population expected to reach 8 billion people by 2025. The initiative aligns the university's research, outreach and operations in a sustained effort to develop, demonstrate and export solutions for food security, health and sustainability throughout California, the United States and the world. From the beginning, this ambitious goal has also included a focus on addressing food security among UC students. Some of these efforts already undertaken have included:

- In 2014, establishing campus food security working groups — including students, staff, faculty and community partners — tasked with coordinating campus food security efforts.
- In 2015, conducting the 2015 Student Food Access and Security Survey — the nation's largest higher education study at the time.
- Also in 2015, convening statewide leadership across two- and four-year colleges and universities by establishing the California Higher Education Food Summit (CHEFS), focused on discussing strategies for improving food security and student success across California.
- Since 2015, UC President Janet Napolitano has allocated more than $4 million to the campuses ($377,000 per campus) to address the challenges of food security and advance a multiyear plan to develop and/or build on support services and new programming to ensure student access to healthy food and basic needs resources.
- In 2017, the campus working groups created the Student Food Access & Security Toolkit that includes best practices and activities developed by UC campuses, sharing key efforts underway to nourish and support students.

[1] The Real Price of College. *Wisconsin Hope Lab.* Retrieved from https://tcf.org/content/report/the-real-price-of-college/ on July 27, 2017.

- Facilitating intersegmental leadership meetings with California Community Colleges (CCC) and California State University (CSU) representatives, to share evidence-based practices to better support students and their basic needs.

At the campus level, these efforts have resulted in the creation of a wide and comprehensive range of resources, including, but not limited to: developing and/or expanding food pantries, donating meals through "Swipe Out Hunger" programs, creating campus basic needs websites, awareness campaigns, and efforts to enhance financial aid literacy, and CalFresh enrollment drives. Further details on the campuses efforts and accomplishments are located in the "University of California's Efforts" section of the report.

UC Housing Initiative

The university also has tackled basic needs challenges by working systemwide to ensure sufficient and affordable student housing. In January 2016, President Janet Napolitano announced the UC Student Housing Initiative to add some 14,000 new affordable beds by 2020 and UC is on track to achieve this goal.

As part of the initiative, the Office of the President has conducted internal development team visits to all 10 campuses to understand specific housing needs, goals and barriers such as debt and community issues. Since May 2016, campuses have been providing detailed presentations on their housing plans to the Board of Regents, including critical information about the unique campus environment and local factors impacting housing availability and affordability for students. These presentations generally included the number of students housed, rental rates as compared to market rate housing, off-campus housing vacancy rates, housing goals, upcoming projects, delivery models being considered, and 10-year financial plans and modeling.

Since the announcement of the President's Student Housing Initiative in January 2016, approximately 3,600 below-market beds have come online and the university is on track for meeting the 14,000 affordable beds goal by fall 2020.

Finally, at their July 2017 meeting, the UC Board of Regents approved providing a one-time $27 million allocation to support campus efforts to address housing needs for students, faculty and staff. The funding is intended to provide assistance for existing or new housing programs, studies in support of advancing new housing projects, and/or capital improvements. Given the unique housing challenges facing each individual campus, they will have the flexibility to utilize the funding based on specific needs.

Student basic needs: A statewide and national issue

Universities and other institutions across the state and country are working to better understand students' basic needs. Research indicates that the challenges students face are problems not only in California, but across the nation. Some of the salient findings among recent studies include:

- A 2015 study by California State University that suggests 9 percent of CSU's 460,000 students are homeless, while 21 percent lack consistent food sources.

- A fall 2016 study by the Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD) that found 63 percent of students surveyed experience food insecurity, with 38 percent experiencing very low food security. Nineteen percent indicated experiencing homelessness within a year of the time the questionnaire was administered.

- A 2017 survey that included 33,000 students across 70 community colleges in 24 states found that 66 percent of students had experienced food insecurity, 50 percent had experienced housing insecurity and 14 percent experienced homelessness at some point. Researchers also determined that there was minimal geographic variation in hunger and homelessness among community college students.[2]

- Other surveys have suggested that more than one in five students had experienced hunger during the past month, and that close to one in 10 responded they had been homeless at some point in the past year.[3]

The State of California has worked to ensure that programs available to assist Californians' basic food needs are also accessible for UC and other college students. The California Legislature has adopted a number of proposals over the past several sessions focused on food assistance for students enrolled in higher education institutions. As a result, California has become the most inclusive and accessible state for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) eligibility for college and university students. Known as CalFresh in California, the program provides eligible students with up to $192 per month that does not negatively affect their financial aid packages. UC is making every effort to ensure eligible students sign-up for CalFresh and that all students know how to access emergency food supplies on campus.

Further demonstrating their commitment to food access, leaders in the California Legislature included in the 2017-18 state budget $2.5 million in one-time funding for each of the three public higher education segments. The funding is to incentivize campuses to become "hunger-free campuses." UC campuses will utilize these important resources to further investment in infrastructure and programs that help support student food security.

2016 UC survey results

As a follow-up to the 2015 Student Food Access and Security Survey (SFASS),[4] the university added food and housing questions to the 2016 UC Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES) and the Graduate Student Well-Being Survey (GSWBS) to further examine the issue of basic needs. This report presents the quantitative findings from these two surveys, with the key findings below.

Food insecurity

- Forty-four percent of undergraduate students and 26 percent of graduate students reported having experienced food insecurity, which is in line with the 2015 SFASS findings of 48 percent and 25 percent, respectively.

- The USDA defines very low food security as reduced food intake or disrupted eating patterns at times due to limited resources. Low food security is defined as reduced quality, variety or desirability of diet, with little or no indication of reduced food intake. These two categories comprise food insecurity.

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[2] Hungry and Homeless in College: Results from a National Study of Basic Needs in Higher Education. *Wisconsin Hope Lab.* Retrieved from http://www.wihopelab.com/publications/Hungry-and-Homeless-in-College-Report.pdf

[3] Shine light on hungry, homeless community college students, https://www.acct.org/news/new-study-new-york-times-op-ed-shine-light-hungry-homeless-community-college-students

[4] Global Food Initiative: Student Food Access and Security Survey, http://www.ucop.edu/global-food-initiative/best-practices/food-access-security/student-food-access-and-security-study.pdf

- The limited validated questions on the 2016 survey do not provide adequate information to distinguish between low and very low food security.

Housing insecurity

As part of its comprehensive approach to student well-being, UC has proactively begun to examine the housing challenges students face. Current data in this area are limited at both the state and national level. Nevertheless, UC took a first internal step of preliminarily assessing housing challenges by including one question on homelessness in its 2016 UCUES and GSWBS surveys, which indicates:

- Five percent of both UC undergraduate and graduate student populations said they had experienced homelessness at some point during their enrollment.
    - The question used has not been validated to ensure it is an accurate measurement of homelessness and the issue of defining "homelessness" and how to correctly measure housing insecurity is still being addressed nationally.
    - The definition of homelessness in the UC question provided responses ranging from "couch surfing" at a friend's place to living on the streets.
    - Moving forward, UC intends to improve upon this preliminary finding with additional research, including using housing-related questions that have been validated to accurately measure housing security.

Moving forward: Implementing a basic needs master plan

Based on the findings of this report, campuses will now be able to prioritize resources and efforts for their most vulnerable student populations. Furthermore, the survey findings will inform the creation of a UC basic needs master plan. Key elements of the master plan will include:

- Establishing a basic needs center (either physically and/or virtually) on each campus, where existing staff and services will be centrally coordinated for greater impact and efficiency. For example, in 2017 UC Irvine opened a spacious 2,630 square foot FRESH Basic Needs Hub where students can:
    - pick up emergency food and toiletries;
    - visit and talk with other students;
    - prepare food in a kitchenette complete with blenders, a convection oven, a microwave and a coffee machine;
    - participate in the Smart 'Eaters Life Skills Series which gives students the education and skills they need to eat healthy on a budget and to learn how to cook affordable, nutrient-dense foods for themselves; and
    - get involved by volunteering in the Hub and/or participating in the FRESH Intern program.
- Identifying and confirming adequate staffing to coordinate and facilitate campus basic needs efforts.
- Updating pre-undergraduate and pre-graduate student informational materials, outreach presentations and programming to include basic needs information.

- Proactively targeting outreach to student populations with higher food and housing insecurity rates (as identified by the survey results presented in this report) and prioritizing resources and efforts for the most vulnerable student populations.

- Hosting on-campus and web-based CalFresh application assistance sessions for eligible student populations. UC has estimated that less than 10 percent of eligible students on each undergraduate campus have enrolled.

- Coordinating and providing trainings and workshops that address: financial literacy, from personal budgeting to college aid packages; healthy and culturally relevant meal provisioning and preparation; housing and rental planning; and self-advocacy.

- Establishing a holistic crisis resolution approach that will go beyond food pantries and look at the root of chronically food insecure and/or homeless students.

- At the systemwide and campus levels, utilizing researched-based evaluations, such as surveys, focus groups and interviews to determine if existing efforts are working and how they can reach more vulnerable student populations.

- Strengthening the existing California higher education basic needs partnership to improve research and evaluation collaborations, local/state/federal policy engagement, and coordination of local to state programming and services.

Tackling the challenges of food and housing insecurity is a long-term, resource-driven endeavor. The “Global Food Initiative: Food and Housing Security at the University of California” report is a major milestone in communicating UC’s expansive approach toward student and systems solutions — incorporating extensive research, outreach and collaboration among campuses and partners — to help students meet basic needs. In just three years, the UC system has built campus and system infrastructure that will facilitate the improvement of ongoing learning, services and systems transformation. UC will continue close collaboration with the State of California, California State University and California Community Colleges to more comprehensively combat the basic-needs challenges that affect students and families statewide.