

What students basic(ally) need:

expanding accessibility, developing current resources, and understanding student needs



Volunteers from the CalFresh Initiative at UCLA distribute free groceries to students at the 2018 Spring Basic Needs Resource Fair (Diana Nguyen / Semel HCI Center at UCLA).

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Instant noodles, packed schedules, lack of sleep— these motifs are often apparent within the college narrative. Our research strives to reframe this culture to create a healthier campus.

With an empty stomach and a sleep-deprived brain, how can a student expect to function, let alone thrive? Many students often struggle to fulfill their basic needs, not just at UCLA but across the nation. Students live on four hours of sleep juggling work *and* full-time academia, decide between paying for textbooks or buying groceries, and as a result sustain themselves on diets revolving around cheap, and destructive foods. Many campuses provide highly effective basic needs resources that can help alleviate these kinds of struggles, particularly at UCLA. Unfortunately, many students remain either unaware or reluctant to seek out help, either due to stigma, lengthy applications, or inaccessibility. Through this project, our goal is to make resources accessible, information available, and inclusivity attainable by developing outreach methods for basic needs resources.

According to a [2017 Global Food Initiative Report](#), 44% of students within the entire UC system experience food insecurity— meaning inadequate access to affordable, healthy, and

Student Responses	Distribution	Cumulative Distribution
"Sometimes True" & "Sometimes True/Never True"	30%	30%
"Often True" & "Sometimes True/Never True"	6%	36%
"Often True" to both	8%	44%
"Never True" to both	56%	100%

Figure 1. Distribution of survey responses to food insecurity questions. Students in all groups except the “Never True” to both” group were considered as food insecure students

culturally appropriate food. Food insecurity and lack of access to basic needs has profoundly negative effects on students’ academic achievement and learning. [Maslow’s hierarchy of](#)

[needs](#) is a renowned psychology theory consisting of a five-tier model of human needs. According to Maslow’s theory, basic physiological needs are the foundation of the pyramid and include food, water, shelter, sleep. If these needs are not met, individuals are restricted from

security, esteem, and self-actualization. These deficiencies hinder students from achieving psychological and self-fulfillment needs such as healthy relationships, creativity, and realizing



Figure 2. Maslow's Pyramid illustrating the five stages of human need. (Coachilla)

one's full potential. The human body and brain simply cannot function optimally when basic physiological needs are not met, making basic needs services at UCLA so critical for students to thrive and realize their full potential.

Students face a multitude of barriers when it comes to resources access at UCLA, causing students to face challenging programs within their academic or personal life. Factors contributing to resource inaccessibility as a student can be first generation status, language barriers, or socio-economic status. As a result of these barriers, and so many more not mentioned, students at UCLA struggle to access the multitude of resources offered. Additionally, commitments to work and school frequently leave little time for health and well-being. Food, housing, and other forms of basic needs insecurity have an intersectional relationship— contributing to the complexities of financial insecurity. Expenses aside from tuition can account for more than 60% of the total cost of attending university; over the past four decades, the cost of living for college students has increased by over 80% (GFI report 2017).

Our research embodies student growth by improving program outreach that emphasize Maslow's hierarchy of needs and fulfill students' basic needs. On campus, the UCLA Basic Needs Committee focuses on 6 areas of need: Accessibility, Finance, Food, [Mental] Health,

Housing, and Safety & Security. In order to understand student knowledge and use of basic needs resources, our research consists of three main parts: developing a microwave map (available on the Basic Needs Website), conducting surveys and leading focus groups, and redesigning the Basic Needs Committee website.

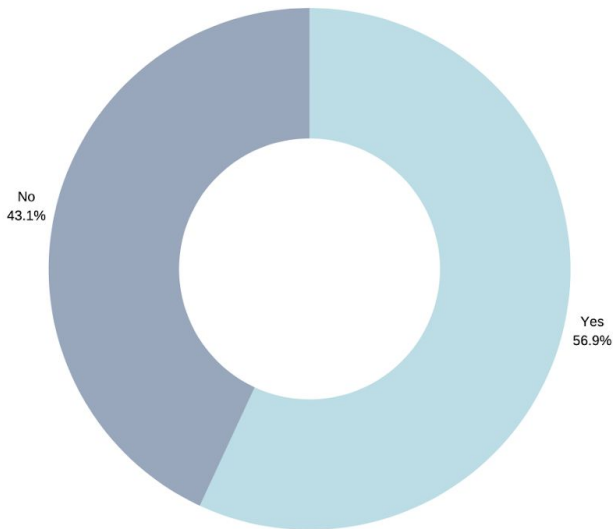


Figure 3. Survey responses to question: "I sometimes worry if I can pay my living expenses (groceries, rent, etc.) next month."

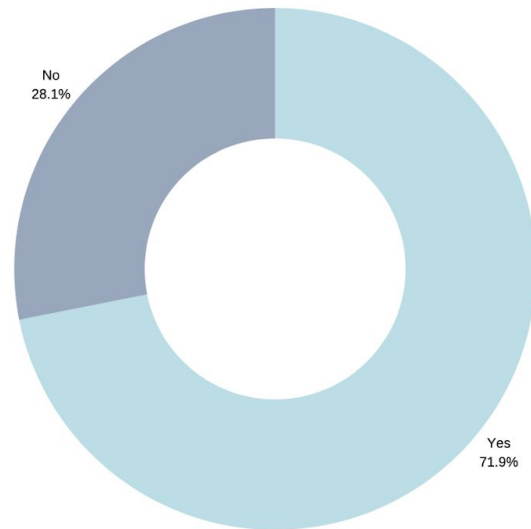


Figure 4. Survey responses to question: "I've gone days on campus skipping meals."

In a survey our team conducted, 56.9% of survey respondents expressed facing financial, food, or housing insecurity--responding "Yes" to the question "I sometimes worry if I can pay my living expenses (groceries, rent, etc.). 71.9% of respondents revealed that they have "gone days on campus skipping meals." There is evidently a need for students to become more aware and utilize existing basic needs resources. Better communication of student resources— such as the CPO Food Closet or Good Clothes, Good People— will help fill the gap between basic needs insecurities and existing infrastructure.

Our research intends to do just that: improve outreach and communication strategies to better connect students with potential resources. Through our campus Microwave Map, we

identify and map public campus microwave locations for student use. Working with IoES developer Scott Gruber and the UCLA Disabilities & Computing Program, the website's redesign will act as a centralized location of basic needs information that is user-friendly, accessible, and comprehensive. All throughout these projects, we are hosting focus groups with our survey respondents to further understand how students inform themselves of campus resources. Results from these focus groups will apply to the development of our website and future basic needs efforts.

As we continue to celebrate UCLA's centennial anniversary and the culmination of milestones our university has reached thus far, we must also recognize the basic foundations of student life to ensure that student needs are met. Only then can the UCLA community continue to not just survive, but thrive as a healthy and harmonious collective. As mentioned, sustaining one's basic needs is a complex process over which students often lack full control, and other initiatives often take precedence over basic needs issues and food justice within a prestigious research institution like UCLA. Yet, these basics are the foundation upon which students build their lives on. Making resources more accessible and inclusive to students here is a necessary priority we must emphasize as we move forward into the next one hundred years of UCLA's future.