Food Justice & Basic Needs 2019 Midterm Report

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Abstract

UCLA has numerous resources regarding food justice and basic needs. Yet, communicating all the services to students is a challenge. There currently is no cohesive source listing all the basic needs services of UCLA, and thus our team aims to increase accessibility to campus resources by compiling all beneficial services within a website. Through updating UCLA's Basic Needs webpage as well as gathering data on current use and knowledge of campus services via surveys and focus groups, our team aims to learn how to improve accessibility to basic needs resources across campus. In facilitating communication of resources to students, our team has researched all of campus' services regarding the seven basic needs and compiled them into a draft for the Basic Needs webpage design. We also created new resources to apply to the website, such as a microwave map and list of student group efforts to become involved in. From there, the information provided to us through the survey and focus group data will help us tailor a campaign to further advertise the webpage and all of UCLA's resources to the appropriate demographics. The expected outcome of our project is to increase basic needs wellness across campus by promoting accessibility to existing UCLA resources through an easily-navigable website which help students find the services they need.

Introduction

While prior teams under the SAR program at UCLA have tackled issues such as measuring and reducing food waste in dining halls, our team has been the first to address the social justice aspect of food insecurity, honing in on sustainability in terms of working to ensure future students' health and access to basic needs resources. The larger issues of food insecurity, the limited access to and knowledge about existing resources on campus, and the dialogues regarding mental health and wellbeing have all been addressed by separate clubs and organizations on UCLA's campus, such as the Community Programs Office, Swipe Out Hunger, and the Semel Healthy Campus Initiative Center, to name a few. However, the various efforts of these separate entities are oftentimes lost amongst the buzz surrounding each venture, with some resources more recognized and well-known than others, and many underutilized when equated to

the potential help they could provide students. The SAR Food Justice and Basic Needs team seeks to find effective methods of compiling and distributing information regarding the available basic needs resources on campus in order to ensure that students who are able to benefit the most from these offerings are knowledgeable on the steps they may take to do so. Through collecting information on existing programs and resources on campus, in addition to gathering original data from students and conducting focus groups, we hope to compile a holistic stockpile of resource knowledge to distribute and further ensure that the basic needs of students on campus are met and acknowledged.

The overarching social justice movement has reached college campuses throughout the nation and the world. Food justice and basic needs, in particular, have also gained momentum as students recognize the increasing pressure on their peers to balance academic life and financial needs. In regard to food justice and food insecurity, there are multiple examples that we can look to for inspiration. For example, the City University of New York (CUNY) Urban Food Policy Institute and Healthy CUNY, a university-wise initiative that promotes health for students in all facets of their lives, came together in Spring of 2018 to launch the CUNY Food Security Advocates Project. The project's goal is to make further progress in ending food security among the university's students. Students campaigned about the importance of food insecurity through various forms of media and there was even a Food Justice Expo at John Jay College led entirely by students who passionately talked about why this issue matters to them and why more people should become involved. Another notable example is that of the Food Justice House at Occidental College, which creates a community of students that are dedicated to sustainable food practices and being environmentally conscious when it comes to eating and cooking. In regard to basic needs, all UC campuses have their own basic needs websites, all with differing information

from the types of initiatives that students can get involved in to related resources that are available for students. One honorable example is that of the California State University's campuswide Basic Needs Initiative which grants money to both student and faculty members who conduct research on basic needs on their respective campuses. These grants are given to students and faculty members who have conducted research projects that are tied to enhancing basic needs strategies on campus. Whether at UCLA or at any other campus, even though there are food justice and basic needs initiatives in place, we can always improve them to serve an ever-evolving generation of students who recognize that their health is very closely tied to their success in college.

Methodology

While SAR projects historically focus on improving UCLA's environmental sustainability, Food Justice and Basic Needs focuses on the social justice aspect of sustainability. We aim to help students live well long-term, throughout their time at UCLA and after. This way, students have the energy and time to contribute to their UCLA community. Outside of SAR, our team members actively involve themselves in basic needs organizations on campus. Thus, we already had ideas for improving students' access to resources and help on campus. We first targeted our knowledge of food insecurity on campus. We discussed how students, particularly commuters and apartment dwellers, bring food to campus. Often, students bring cold foods since they struggle to find microwaves. Hence, we decided to map microwaves on campus so that students can bring a wider variety of foods to campus. Next, we discussed finding resources on campus. We recognized there exist many sites that list resources, but no website that lists all of the links and addresses. Therefore, students have trouble finding what they need, since getting help requires multiple Google searches rather than using one site that gives all the information

possible. Consequently, we decided to re-design the current basic needs website to have links and addresses to all varying sorts of resources at UCLA. This website will help students quickly and efficiently find the help they need. Through our team's experience with basic needs, we understand the anxiety and doubtfulness provoked by the sheer number of outdated links and emails that appear on google after any search for help at UCLA. We also understand that students who need help, be it financially, emotionally, or any other need, already experience stress. Therefore, redesigning the site to be more user-friendly and intuitive will help students get the help they need with far less stress. Additionally, this would be large step in making resources more accessible to the student community. Overall, we want the students to be aware of resources that are available to them and ultimately feel supported on this campus.

One of our first tasks we began working on was the microwave map that our stakeholder proposed. We split up UCLA's campus into three sections and began individually exploring our assigned areas for microwaves. We found that some microwave locations are notably better than others. Some are located in student lounges where there are comfortable places for students to sit while they eat. On the other hand, some are public, outside locations that are better for on-the-go use. Unfortunately, we discovered that some of the indoor ones are intended for private use within specific departments or closed off to undergraduate students. These are important factors to be noted on the final microwave map, so our final list of locations includes these details. In total, we found over thirty microwaves! From here, we plan on passing our compiled information onto a student working with the Global Food Initiative to initiate the design and finishing stages of the project.

Our next task involved deconstructing the UCLA basic needs website and establishing the changes we would like to see. We want to make it a more effective site to communicate basic

needs resources to those who visit it because the current website lacks function, clarity, and helpfulness. The main aim of the website is to clearly communicate student resources regarding financial wellness, food security, mental health, safety, security, housing, and accessibility. To begin with, each team member was assigned one of these seven pillars of basic needs to research what campus resources best tackle each pillar. We searched for the main campus organizations, clubs, offices, and websites that address our each basic need and began compiling relevant information for our sections. We also brainstormed how we wanted to convey all this information on our website. We are now entering the design phase and beginning to breakdown the actual structure of the current website. One of the first issues we all noticed with the website layout was the front page, which displays a series of icons for different categories of resources. However, none of these icons are actually clickable, deeming them essentially useless. We would still like to incorporate icons in the site, but also give them functionality by linking them to additional information. Scott Gruber, a talented designer and developer for IoES, is helping us with this next phase of website design. We will use UCLA's color templates and website design templates, to make our website look cohesive with UCLA and its other sites.

Challenges and Difficulties

Over this quarter, our team has been met with a series of hurdles. However, we continue to work through them. Our primary challenge is the fact that one of our most prominent action items is to redesign the Basic Needs website, however, no member of our team has had past experience with web design. Fortunately, we've been able to meet with Scott and we look forward to learn the process of designing a website with him. Originally, we assumed we would create a visual via Photoshop and then submit the ideas to our stakeholder who would then present it to a website designer who would essentially put our vision into code and then reality.

However, after meeting with Scott, we realized how much actually goes into designing a website and all the various facets to consider so time will definitely be a challenge we encounter in the Spring. We also realized that creating a visual via Photoshop would not be the most ideal due to how static of a program it is and would not create the most accurate product. Therefore, Scott has presented a few other programs, that we have little to no knowledge of, but that would be better suited for our purposes. Although it is a daunting task to learn a new program and understand the process of website design, we are very excited to get the opportunity to work with Scott and learn how to use these programs. We also realize that although this process of website design, although will be more complicated, we know this will ultimately lead to creating a final product, a better user-friendly website. Moreover, Scott had brought up to us that we need to consider the accessibility of the website alone in regards to the design, font, text size, color scheme, etc. so we are so grateful to be able to learn these things from Scott that we otherwise would not have considered. Additionally, we have noticed that there are many UCLA affiliated websites that provide the same resources as we aim to and have similar goals and intentions. Therefore, we are deciding what the best way to go about designing this website is as we want it, ultimately, to be useful for students but not just a replica of another website. However, after having talked to our stakeholder and each other, we envision our website to be an all-encompassing website, a phone-book type website if you will. Although it will undoubtedly include many of the same resources and may link to other websites for further information, we intend for it to be the center point for resources, directing students to where is necessary for further information.

Aside from our website, we also have the goal of completing surveys and hosting focus groups to gain a better understand of people's knowledge of resources on campus. Similar to our challenges with the website, we also do not have prior experience with hosting focus groups.

However, we are addressing this by speaking to our stakeholder and other individuals/ project teams that have. In the beginning, there were concerns with how to have surveys and conduct a focus group as those who benefit from basic needs resources is a sensitive population. However, we realized that the goal of our survey and focus group was to find out people's current knowledge of basic needs resources and therefore was not only directed to those who currently use resources, but really our goal was to assess the whole campus's knowledge of basic needs resources. We didn't just want to reach out to students who already use resources such as the food closet, but also graduate students who have never heard of food closet or food insecurity.. We also are concerned with the population we will be reaching for our survey in a different aspect and focus group as we would like a diverse base of participants. Therefore, we plan to reach out to different groups, during different events, and especially reaching out to graduate students. We are also realizing that we have a lot to work on in a mere 10 weeks and therefore will have to consciously choose how to allocate our time. Now that we have honed in our scope, we must plan a detailed timeline for next quarter to successfully accomplish these tasks.

Future Plans

Despite all the challenges that lie ahead, our team is even more determined to continue our work going into Spring Quarter. In the beginning of our research, the goal and scope for our team was a bit ambiguous. We acknowledged that there were already many campus led basic needs efforts and were unsure of where a SAR team would fit. Perhaps we would work with the complexity of student-based initiatives and establish a central form of communication? Or we would work alongside food recovery student groups?

After these past 10 weeks, our student research team realized that we focused more on student-based efforts and forgot to also acknowledge the complexity of faculty and staff led basic

needs work. Even though students comprise of a large portion of basic needs work, students terms and time at UCLA is limited. By focusing on staff and faculty led work like UCLA Basic Needs, the Community Programs office, the Semel Healthy Campus Initiative Center, etc., our team would be able to improve structures that are already established and long-term. This is what our re-design for the Basic Needs website will do--create a central online body of information collective of campus resources from different UCLA departments, faculty-led work, and student-based initiatives. By compiling as much campus resources in one location, we hope that the Basic Needs website becomes a phone book for students looking to attain support.

Alongside our re-design for the Basic Needs website, we are also hoping to conduct surveys and focus groups during Spring Quarter. Luckily, within the first few weeks of the quarter, there are an abundance of campus events and celebrations: Earth Month, CPO's Food Closet is celebrating their 10th anniversary, UCLA's 100th Anniversary, Semel HCI Center's Annual Celebration, etc. We are hoping to conduct surveys assessing student knowledge and usage of current basic needs resources. By attending these various events, our team would be able to have a large survey population of students who don't already use campus resources like the food closet. We will also be collecting potential focus group participants through our surveys and hope to conduct them in May.

Through our focus groups, we would be able to further understand what students know about basic needs resources, why they use (or don't use) current resources, and suggestions on improving student accessibility and awareness of these resources. We will also ask for feedback on our developing website re-designs to garner how use-friendly and useful the new design would be. This will be valuable feedback as the opinion of our team on the website and knowledge of resources is skewed by the fact that many of us do work in the Basic Needs realm

and have actively been researching it. Therefore, we will be able to understand if the information we present and the design it is conveyed through is as approachable and understandable as we want it to be. By the end of the quarter, we hope to have a complete redesign of the website delivered to the website developer to start on the online remodeling. We will continue to work with Scott Gruber throughout the design and research for our website. We see the potential of a Basic Needs Website- how a well organized and user friendly website will itself be a valuable resource to students. We are excited to be able to piece together the knowledge of Basic Needs with the knowledge of a functional and well-designed website. Results from our surveys would be readily made available to Basic Needs, the Community Programs Office, and other student-based or staff-and-faculty-led initiatives for their own personal insights and knowledge. We look forward to further developing our project and vision during this next quarter and creating a product that will become a vital resource for the UCLA community.

Appendix
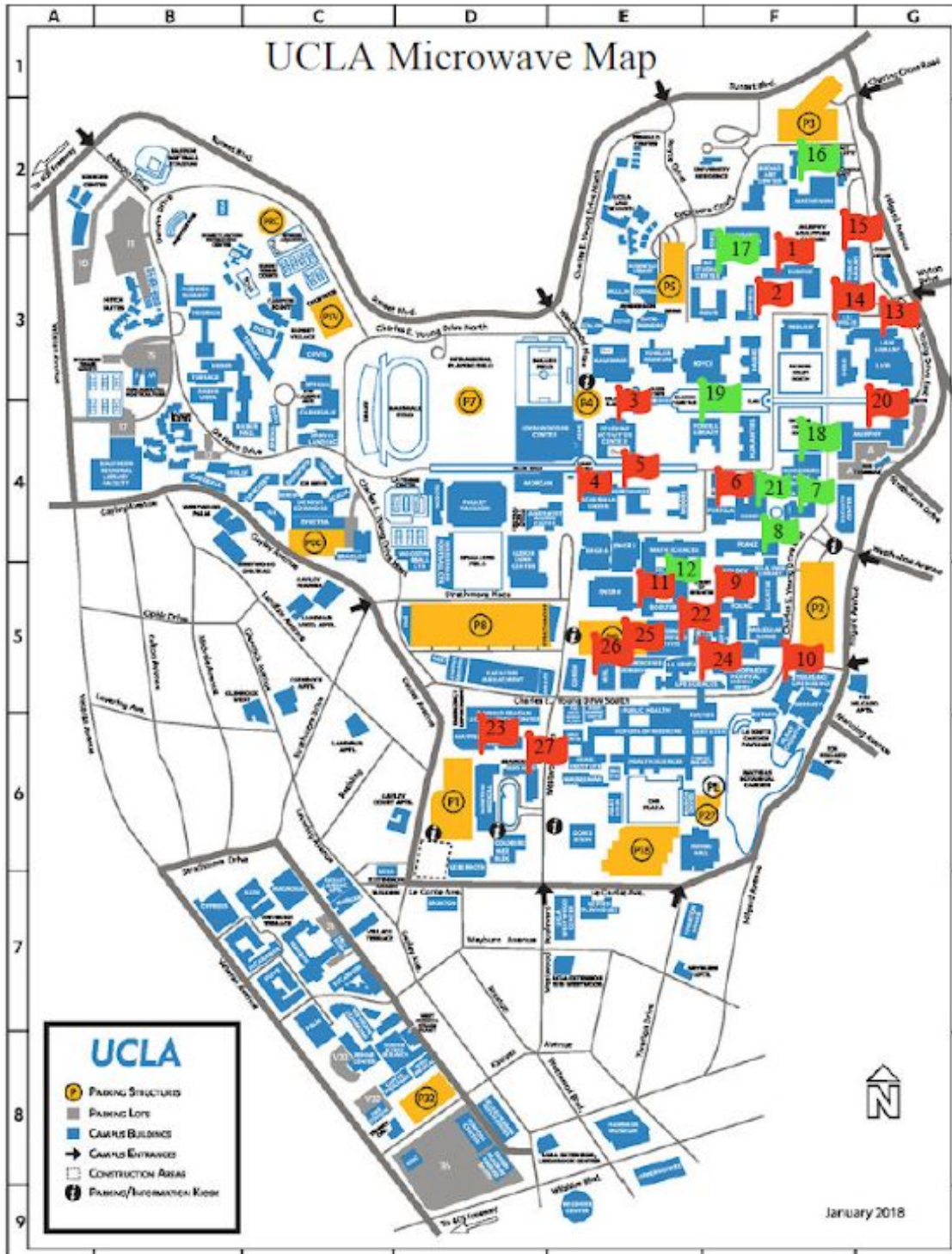
Current microwave map created as a collaboration with GFI Fellow Nina Adarkar.