

BEYOND THE BASICS:

A Comprehensive Look at CalFresh
and Food Access on UCI's Campus



Denise Ramos-Vega

Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellow

UCI Basic Needs Center

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UCI Basic Needs Center



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KEY TERMS

CALFRESH

A federally funded food assistance program that provides eligible households up to \$291 (per household of 1) in electronic benefits to purchase select food items at most grocery stores.

“PERSON-CENTERED AFFIRMATION”

Per the definition of GamblinConsults; In order to fully support one another, we must affirm realistic expectations rooted in the elevation of an individual as a whole¹.

FOOD INSECURITY

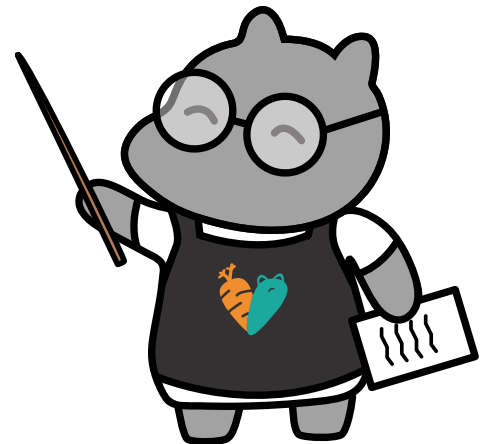
Per the USDA’s definition, defined as the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or limited or certain ability to acquire acceptable food in socially acceptable ways².

STUDENT ELIGIBILITY

Aside from being required to meet the two basic CalFresh eligibilities, students must also possess a student eligibility which can be one of many conditions such as receiving a TANF funded Cal Grant or working over 20 hours per week (**see full list on page 10**).

CALFRESH PRESCREEN

A form on CampusGroups which asks students a series of questions to determine whether or not they may potentially be eligible for CalFresh benefits.



¹ <http://gamblinconsults.com/>

² “Measurement.” USDA ERS - Measurement, October 25, 2023. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/measurement/>.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

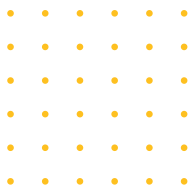
I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude to the UCI Basic Needs Center, its pro staff, student staff, in addition to the UCI student population I had the pleasure of serving. I will carry eternal admiration for all at UCI working to end collegiate hunger. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work alongside some of the most dedicated individuals.

Thank you for welcoming me into the anteater community with open arms, **zot zot!**

I would also like to thank the CalFresh Team in particular. Sandra Cuyuch, thank you for your support, guidance, mentorship, friendship, and laughs during this time. I could not have asked for a better supervisor. Hannah Chau, thank you for your kindness, support, and friendship. I will miss being welcomed into the office with your brightness.

Thank you to Tony Jackson and the Congressional Hunger Center for the opportunity to serve through the Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellowship.

Lastly, Katie Tzivanis, my field site partner. Thank you for being such an amazing human. Your unwavering support, love, and encouragement have truly gotten me through even the most stressful of times.



INTRODUCTION

According to a recent federal study, 22.6% of students face low or very low food security (9.4% and 13.2%, respectively)³. At University of California, Irvine (UCI), the narrative is no different. In fact, the numbers are much higher. According to the University of California 2022 Undergraduate Experiences Survey (UCUES), 42% of undergraduate students experience some sort of food insecurity⁴, a rate almost twice that of the federal survey.

Food insecurity is a prevalent issue throughout the United States with the COVID-19 pandemic solely exacerbating the challenge especially among college students. Hunger affects students in a variety of ways. From mental health implications, to physical health challenges, to social burdens, students are affected holistically, thus solutions put forth should also keep in mind all **beyond basic needs**.

At UCI, the UCI Basic Needs Center provides an oasis for students whose basic needs are not being met. Housed on the intersection of Academy Way & Peltason Drive where Cafe Med once stood, this center provides students with access to a plethora of resources under one roof. One of the most valuable is CalFresh Application assistance as it provides students with long-term support to meet their nutritional needs.

This report aims to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the outreach efforts put forth by the UCI Basic Needs Center's CalFresh Team in order to maximize CalFresh awareness amongst the UCI community. Although heavily based on numerical data, the report will also dive into first-hand accounts of event attendees and their feedback. Additionally, insight on initiatives such as the FRESH Pantry and Mobile Food Pantry by the Basic Needs Center will be highlighted.

³ US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Food Security Status: Previous 30 days", National Postsecondary Student Aid Study: Undergraduate Students (NPSAS: UG); accessed January 4, 2024, <https://nces.ed.gov/>

⁴ <https://visualizedata.ucop.edu/t/Public/views/BasicNeedsandCompletion/FoodInsecurity>



BACKGROUND

UCI BASIC NEEDS CENTER

The absence of students' basic needs results in threats to their overall well-being such as poor health, mental health which in turn, cause lower academic outcomes. Since state and federal supports have not risen alongside the skyrocketing costs of living, many students who have do not have the means to meet their basic needs. Forced to take additional jobs, skip meals, and reduce their academic focus, these students remain vulnerable without support.

Luckily, UCI's students have the UCI Basic Needs Center to support them. "How can I support you?" is a phrase you'll hear whenever you step into the center. Eager to help, fellow student advocates and pro-staff are trained to provide guidance for students who seek it.

At other institutions, student resources are not housed under one center, they are scattered around campus making it difficult to seek support when needed, especially in times of crisis. The Basic Needs Center houses a variety of programs that aid students hoping to meet their basic needs. From CalFresh Application Assistance, to the FRESH Pantry, to Economic Crisis Response Grants, the Basic Needs Center provides a wide variety of services for students and their dependents (see full list on page 7).

SERVICES @ UCI BASIC NEEDS CENTER

Zot Bites

Text notification platform that invites students as after-event guests to receive excess food once a catered event is over.

Financial Wellness Consultations

Confidential peer-to-peer consultations that provide students w/ guidance to achieve their financial goals.

CalFresh Application Assistance

1-on-1 CalFresh application assistance appointments in-person or via zoom.

Emergency Meal Swipes

Available for students experiencing food insecurity by granting them access to UCI's dining commons.

FRESH Pantry

Provides food & toiletries once a week to UCI students experiencing basic needs insecurities.

Short-Term Grocery Card Support

One-time grocery store gift card for students unable to physically access FRESH Pantry.

Short-Term Transportation Support

Lyft passes for students with financial barriers to access basic needs resources.

Diaper Bank Support

Monthly supply of diapers for parenting students from OC Diaper Bank via Community Action Partnership of OC.

Economic Crisis Reponse Grant

Case-specific, university intervention to be utilized to address a student's financial crisis.

Campus Social Worker Consultation

Appointments with on-campus clinical social worker to provide support and guidance to students.

Basic Needs Sponsored Housing

30-days of temporary housing with a meal plan to students facing homelessness.

FOOD (IN)SECURITY AT UCI

UC Undergraduate Experience Survey

The UC Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES) is a survey sent out to all students within the University of California (UC) system every even numbered year. This survey contains an assortment of questions curated to collect information about the undergraduate student experience. Some of the topics covered include co-curricular experience, plans and aspirations, as well as campus climate for diversity and inclusion. This data is used in UC Annual Accountability Reports, UC Budget for Current Operations, and to inform regents' committees.

Over time, the survey has expanded to gather further insight on the experience of undergraduate students.

Figure 1: Undergraduate Food (In)Security

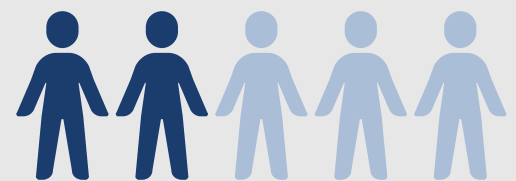
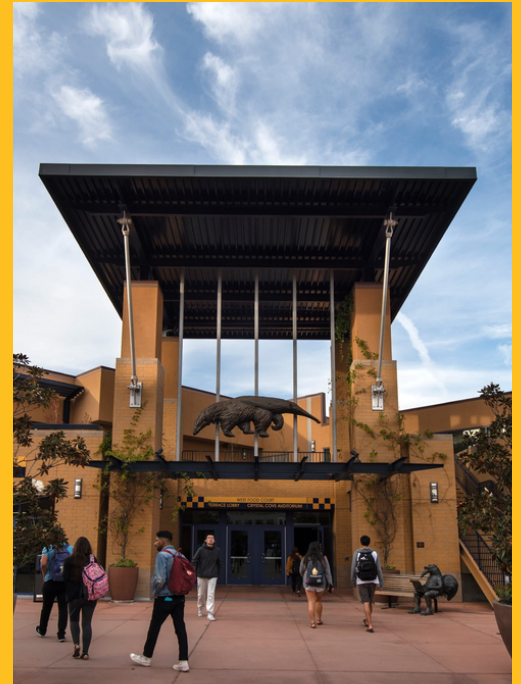
	Food secure	Food insecure	Low food security	Very low food security
Overall	58%	42%	17%	25%
African American	51%	49%	16%	34%
American Indian	44%	56%	17%	39%
AAPI	59%	41%	17%	24%
Hispanic/Latino	49%	51%	18%	32%
White	64%	36%	17%	19%
Domestic Unknown	69%	31%	14%	18%
International	65%	35%	19%	16%

Source: UCUES (<https://visualizedata.ucop.edu/t/Public/views/BasicNeedsandCompletion/Foodinsecurity>);
Note: Food insecure column is a sum of the low & very low food insecurity columns.

Among undergraduate students, 42% face some form of food insecurity (very low, or low food security).

American Indian and Hispanic/Latinx students are least likely to be food secure possessing rates of 44% and 49% respectively.

Students who identify as 'Domestic Unknown', International, and White students are most likely to be food secure at rates of 69%, 65% and 64% respectively.



2 of every 5 undergraduate students is food insecure

FOOD (IN)SECURITY AT UCI

UC Graduate Student Experience Survey



The UC Graduate Student Experience Survey (UCGSES) is a survey newer than the UCUES. This survey is administered to graduate students within the UC system during odd years. Similar to the UCUES, this survey asks a variety of questions which aid the UC in order to better understand the population.

The survey contains questions on less topics than those of the UCUES. Nevertheless, the input of these students is valuable and necessary for the UC.

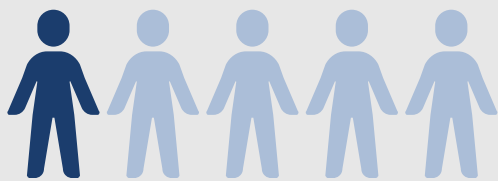
Figure 2: Graduate Student Food (In)Security

	Food secure	Food insecure	Low food security	Very low food security
Overall	77%	23%	13%	10%
African American	60%	40%	19%	21%
AAPI	78%	22%	11%	11%
Hispanic/Latino	66%	34%	18%	16%
White	82%	18%	9%	9%
Domestic Unknown	74%	26%	18%	8%
International	79%	21%	13%	8%

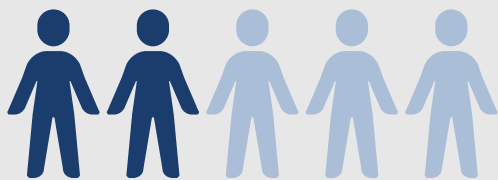
Source: UCGSES; <https://visualizedata.ucop.edu/t/Public/views/BasicNeedsandCompletion/Foodinsecurity>; Note: Food insecure column is a sum of the low & very low food insecurity columns.

Among undergraduate students, 23% face some form of food insecurity (very low, or low food security). Although this is around half of the rates faced by undergraduate students, food insecurity is still an issue as being food insecure is NOT normal. It is NOT alright, Nobody should be food insecure.

African American and Hispanic/Latino students are most likely to be food insecure at 40% and 34%, respectively. White graduate students are 22% less likely to be food insecure than African American students.



1 of every 5 graduate students is food insecure



2 of every 5 African American graduate students is food insecure



LIMIT OF 3

LIMIT OF 3

LIMIT OF 3

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CALFRESH APPLICATION ASISSTANCE ANALYSIS



CALFRESH

Also known as SNAP in other states

CalFresh is a food assistance program funded by the United States Department of Agriculture. CalFresh grants eligible individuals up to \$291 a month (per household of one) of electronic benefits transferred via an electronic benefits card. These funds can be used to purchase fruits, vegetables, snacks, meat, and cold, prepared food. Aside from meeting the basic eligibilities of making below a certain monthly income, college

students must also meet a student eligibility (see full list below). Some eligibilities include being part of a certain program or being a TANF-Funded Cal Grant recipient. Although students can apply on their own without the support of an advocate, the application has a lot of intricacies that when overlooked, can cause a wrongful denial. Unfortunately despite the array of eligibilities, many students still remain left out.

CalFresh Student Eligibilities

- **TANF Funded Cal Grant**
- **Working 20+ Hours/Week**
- **Being Employed on Campus**
- **Being a part of certain majors, minors, or graduate programs.**

- **Having Accepted Federal Work Study**
- **Being a Teaching or Research Assistant**
- **Being in a Student Success Initiative (SSI) Program**
- **Being a Parenting Student**

Programs a part of the programs eligibility are called Local Programs that Increase Employability (LPIE). These programs are approved by the California Department of Social Services and identified by individuals on the CalFresh team.

LPIE Examples:

- Sociology B.A.
- J.D.
- Physics B.S.
- Education Minor
- Chemistry B.S.
- Criminology B.A.
- East Asian Studies PhD
- M.D.



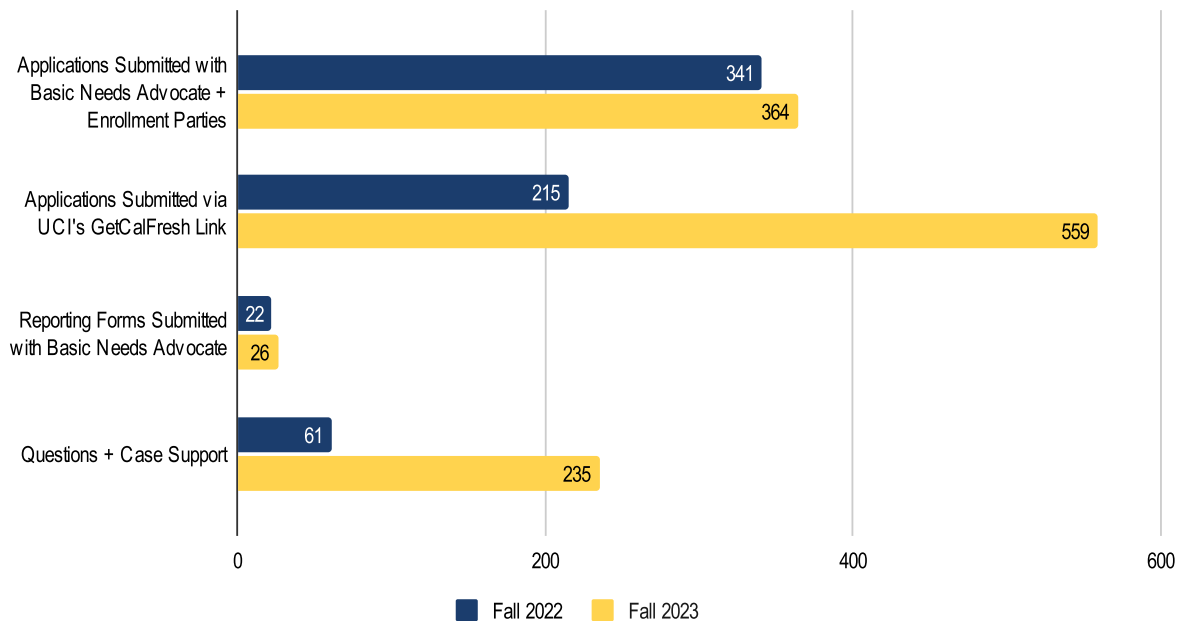
Assistance Provided by Basic Needs Advocates

Basic Needs Advocates are student staff trained to provide CalFresh support. Their duties range from hosting class pitches to helping students apply to CalFresh.

These student advocates are equipped to serve a myriad of cases in a confidential and caring manner which provides comfort to students in a variety of situations.

Each student undergoes extensive training to ensure they are as prepared as possible. Nevertheless, there is always at least one CalFresh pro-staff member available to aid any student who may have a doubt as it is better to say one does not know an answer opposed to giving the incorrect information considering a student's access to basic needs is at stake.

Figure 3: Assistance by Basic Needs Advocates Fall 2022 & 2023



Students can easily create appointments to meet with Basic Needs Advocates through a user-friendly scheduling software, Acuity. This software also allows pro-staff to track support granted to students in addition to the ability to easily assign students to take on these cases.

Students seeking aid schedule appointments for application assistance, re-application assistance, recertification assistance, to get questions answered, and for general case support.

In Fall 2023, a total of 364 applications were submitted with Basic Needs Center support. This is 23 more applications than Fall 2022.

Additionally, 26 reporting forms were submitted by students with the support of a Basic Needs Advocate. Reporting forms, SAR 7 and recertification, are interchangeably due every six months for all CalFresh recipients to ensure they are still eligible.

235 students booked appointments to ask questions and/or receive case support. This is a sharp increase from only 61 in Fall 2022. The skyrocketing increase can be credited to various factors such as an improved social media presence, the introduction of Walk-In Application Assistance in addition to word-of-mouth as many students mention a friend has used our services.

The team provides CalFresh case support by contacting the county on a student's behalf. This exchange happens once a student fills out a Release of Information (ROI) form that is then uploaded on the student's county portal. This grants the professional CalFresh staff at the Basic Needs Center the ability to obtain information about a student's case and provide the case support a student is requesting.

Some examples of case support include:

- Reopening a closed case.
- Re-evaluation of a wrongful denial (Ex. At times, county workers are unaware of the existence of the LPIE program or campus employment program thus causing students to be wrongfully denied).
- Providing clarification on specific situations (Ex. A student's benefits were reduced due to working increased hours, but it was only a temporary increase during their week-long break from school).
- Connecting a student and caseworker via a merged phone call to complete an on-the-spot interview.
- Asking to re-evaluate reporting forms if they were turned in late.

Although the CalFresh professional staff team is composed of solely two individuals, they are able to provide students with valuable assistance that they are truly unable to receive anywhere else.

Although this case support is not a new service, the numbers between this and last Fall grew by more than three-fold. The CalFresh team hopes to see these numbers continue to grow as they indicate the growing trust that students have within the team.



When asked about what she thought about this skyrocketing increase in support numbers, Sandra Cuyuch, CalFresh manager, stated "I'm glad students are reaching out, CalFresh terminology and processes can be intimidating and overwhelming....I'm glad we can help them comprehend what is happening with their cases and are able to point them in the right direction".

The compassion, patience, and professionalism of Basic Needs Advocates and professional staff ensures student comfortability and trust which in turn, results in more students seeking aid when necessary.

UCI Basic Needs Center



Main Door
Welcome to the UCI Basic Needs Center!



OUTREACH ANALYSIS



CALFRESH OUTREACH

In an effort to reach a broader population, the CalFresh team participates in extensive outreach events, programs, and efforts throughout campus to spread awareness and knowledge on the program. Throughout the current CalFresh manager's time at the Basic Needs Center, various strategies have been implemented and others have been suspended due to limited reach despite tedious preparation and time consumption.

Some examples of outreach strategies include class pitches and group application days (see full list below). All the current strategies have proven themselves beneficial when spreading information about CalFresh.

In fact, one strategy is even aimed towards UCI staff as trained staff will better serve the student population they work alongside.

Throughout my time with the team, I noticed that straight-to-the-point, attention-grabbing strategies are key in marketing outreach events. The presence of signage which clearly states "Free Croissants" or "Free Coffee" draws students into our table and encourages them to ask who we are and what we do. The same goes for promotion of services and events. Signage is key in ensuring attention is brought to the services offered.

A once popular effort, periodic tabling on ring road, was suspended as it would pull two student advocates away from the office and very few students would seek information at the table. Most of the time, those who would stop by were people who were already aware of our services and had simple questions or some were visitors asking where the bathroom was located.

CalFresh Outreach Strategies

- **Class Pitches**
- **CalFresh Walk-In Assistance**
- **CalFresh 'n Food**
- **Basic Needs Advocate Training for UCI Staff**
- **Mass Emails to CalGrant and Work Study Recipients**
- **Application Days**
- **Enrollment Parties**
- **Tabling at Campus Events**





Outreach Methods

Class Pitches

CalFresh student advocates conduct class pitches to professors who welcome them. Individuals on the CalFresh team email professors throughout the quarter asking if they would welcome a short presentation, once the professor agrees, a time is chosen and the presentation takes place. The presentation showcases a short summary of the CalFresh program and how to access our services.

CalFresh Walk-In Assistance

Busy students do not always have time to schedule an appointment thus the creation of CalFresh Walk-In assistance. Students can stop by the table set up twice a week outside the Basic Needs Center wherein a student advocate is present and readily available to provide any support a student may need or point a student in the right direction for their case's next steps.

CalFresh 'n Food

CalFresh 'n Food is an outreach event wherein students are given a food, snack, or drink item in exchange for them filling out a pre-screen form. This event has proven itself successful as the two events that have happened have garnered over one hundred and twenty pre-screen submissions.

Basic Needs Advocate Training

Late last year, the Basic Needs Center hosted a Basic Needs Advocate training for UCI staff wherein short presentations were given about the services offered by the center. Over seventy staff members were in attendance. This event is effective in outreach as attendees are now equipped to adequately direct a student in need.

Mass Emails

Emails are sent by the CalFresh manager to students who have accepted federal work study plus TANF-Funded (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) CalGrant recipients.

Other UC campuses' financial aid offices send these notification emails, yet UCI's does not. The Basic Needs Center should continue asking the financial aid office to send these emails as they have proven to be successful at other campuses.

Group Application Days

Periodically, group application days are hosted wherein one CalFresh advocate is leading a group to submit CalFresh applications. The most successful event was hosted with Student Services II, a center on campus that houses various programs for students.

Enrollment Parties

This is by far the most successful outreach event as students are granted the opportunity to fill out their application, complete their interview and receive their electronic benefits (EBT) card on the same day. On average, these events are hosted twice a quarter.

Tabling at Campus Events

Basic Needs Advocates and/or staff will occasionally table at campus events and spread CalFresh awareness or take questions from students. Some events that the team has been present at this school year include the housing communities' sustainability festival, the beginning of the year's student activities fair, and a graduate student resource event.

Figure 4: CalFresh Events/Tablings with Most Pre-Screens

Date	Event	Prescreens
9.25.2023	Anteater Involvement Fair, PharmD Pitch	153
10.3.2023	Unspecified Event	79
1.23.2024	CalFresh ‘n Cold Brew	69
1.30.2024	CalFresh ‘n Croissants	60

Out of all the events that have occurred since the beginning of the school year, the Anteater Involvement Fair, CalFresh ‘n Cold Brew, CalFresh ‘n Croissants, and an unknown event on October 3, 2023 have been the events wherein most prescreens have been gathered.

A CalFresh Prescreen is a form on CampusGroups which asks students a series of questions to determine whether or not they may potentially be eligible for CalFresh benefits.

If potentially eligible, the link to sign up for an appointment is sent over to the student. If a student seems to be ineligible, the student receives a list of additional resources available for them.





MARKETING ANALYSIS



INSTAGRAM REELS

Marketing Analysis

Straight-to-the-point, engaging Instagram Reels are key in increasing CalFresh visibility on social media. The use of trending sounds, templates, and engaging graphics within the video have the ability to ensure it will be shared, watched, and absorbed by the viewer. When brainstorming each of the videos I created, I ensured the topic is relevant, useful, and easily comprehensible.

CalFresh Reel Topics

- What is CalFresh?
- CalFresh Eligibilities
- Metrolink Discount
- CalFresh Mythbusters
- CalFresh Walk-In Assistance
- Shop with me!



Assistance Provided by Basic Needs Advocates

Figure 5: Instagram Reels with Most Plays on @UCIBASICNEEDS

Date Posted	Topic	Plays
Dec. 1, 2023	Metrolink Discount with CalFresh	6680
Oct. 24, 2023	What is CalFresh?	6584
Nov. 17, 2023	CalFresh Walk-Ins	4753

QR Codes to Instagram Reels





SH

UC

All-Bran
Organic
Pumpkin Spice Cheerios
LIMITED EDITION

FAMILY SIZE
Pumpkin Spice Cheerios
LIMITED EDITION
FAMILY SIZE
Pumpkin Spice Cheerios
LIMITED EDITION
FAMILY SIZE
Pumpkin Spice Cheerios
LIMITED EDITION

Sysco
Imperial
RICE RONI
SPANISH RICE

Stove Top
SAUSAGE GRAVY

ICE STICKS

On the Border
Tortilla Chips

On the Border
Tortilla Chips

ZODIAK CAKES

Funables

Corn Muffins

Funables

Funables

Lily's

Condiments: Ketchup, Mustard, Soy Sauce

Canned Goods: Soups, Beans, Corn

Hunt's
Canned Tomatoes

Progresso
Canned Soups

Broccoli

Snacks

Snacks

Snacks

RECOMMENDATIONS



RECOMMENDATIONS

CalFresh ‘n Food Events on Ring Road

Beginning Winter 2024, the CalFresh team began a series of CalFresh ‘n Food events on Ring Road, a high traffic walkway on campus. Students were asked to fill out the CalFresh prescreen form, a form that determines whether or not they may be eligible for CalFresh, in exchange for a food or drink. The first event was “CalFresh ‘n Cold Brew” wherein we handed out canned coffees. 72 coffees were distributed to students.

As mentioned above, periodic tabling for CalFresh on ring road was suspended as very few students would stop by for information. On the contrary, the CalFresh ‘n Food events attract numerous students with the “FREE [insert food item]” sign planted in front of the table. These events should continue throughout the school year and beyond as they do not fail to attract students, who doesn’t like a free snack?

CalFresh ‘n Food Ideas

- Cocoa
- Chocolate
- Conversation Hearts
- Cotton Candy
- Cronuts
- Chai
- Churros
- Cinnamon Rolls
- Cinnamon Twists
- Chimichangas
- Caramel Apples
- Capuccinos
- Crepes
- Chicken wings
- **Or simply any other food, snack, or drink item. It does not have to start with a C.**



RECOMMENDATIONS

Pre-Screening When Using Pantry

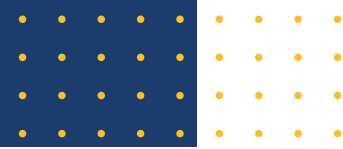
When asking a small handful of students waiting to use the pantry, we found out that some students may qualify for CalFresh, but do not apply for unknown reasons. Others are unaware CalFresh exists, others do not qualify due to citizenship status, and some are CalFresh recipients, but still use the pantry for unknown reasons. Students using the pantry who may qualify for CalFresh should be required to at least

fill out the pre-screen as pantry funds are unfortunately not finite. This would then inform the FRESH Pantry as well as grant the CalFresh team some reasoning as to why some students refrain from applying.

“Refer a Friend” Reward Program

When asked how they found out about our services, many students state that they get referred by their friends. By referring friends, stigma surrounding CalFresh is lessened as a friend is using it. Of course efforts from the CalFresh team to increase CalFresh visibility are valuable, but there is truly nothing like a close friend referring you to the services offered. In an effort to increase this, a “refer a friend” reward program should be put in place.

Each quarter there should be three prizes for students with the highest amount of referrals. These prizes can range anywhere from gift cards to small kitchen appliances or other prizes desirable to college students. Referrals can be tracked through acuity as students will be asked to put down their friend’s full name when scheduling an appointment if referred by a friend.



RECOMMENDATIONS

CalFresh Reels

As mentioned on earlier, CalFresh reels were successful in garnering skyrocketing view numbers when compared to other reels (see page 12 for more details).

In order to ensure this initiative continues, there should be a designated person on the CalFresh team who is in charge of making reels. These reels take anywhere between three to four hours, thus it is a heavy

task. All the editing for the videos created by myself was completed on Canva. The voiceovers were done on my phone and downloaded onto Canva. Additionally, the individual doing the voiceover must ensure they are speaking in an animated manner which keeps the viewer engaged.

A CalFresh Reel idea list is included below for future reference.

CalFresh Reel Ideas

- What are LPIE's?
- Where to Find the CalFresh Office.
- Shop with Me!
- Affordable Connectivity Program
- Finals Frenzy--One Pot Dinners!
- Plant a Small Garden with me!
- Shop with Me at a Local Farmer's Market!
- Museums for all Program with CalFresh
- Midterms Mayhem--Quick Snack Ideas!
- Utility Discounts your CalFresh Qualifies you for!
- Enrollment Party vlog!
- California Lifeline.
- Promotion for Referral Rewards Program.
- Cook with me!

GOING BEYOND

The UCI Basic Needs Center not only focuses on providing students with means to meet their basic needs, they go beyond to ensure students are adequately set up for success in all aspect of their holistic wellbeing.

From providing a weekly pantry visit to diapers for parenting students to simply having somebody to walk beside when walking to the student counseling center, the Basic Needs Center is readily available to aid students in all types of situations.

All team members carry such a welcoming and compassionate demeanor that is felt when stepping into the building. The warmth of those in the center encourages students to ask for help when needed and ensures them they are not alone even during the most trying times.

When asked about why she does what she does, CalFresh Manager, Sandra Cuyuch, she responded: “students should not have to worry about where to get their next meal...I received CalFresh when I was growing up...if a student does not have food in the morning, how are they supposed to thrive?”.

The continuity of this work is essential in ensuring student wellbeing.

At the beginning of the school year, the Basic Needs Center as well as other student affairs programs had funding cuts of 30% thus forcing these centers to make do with their resources. UCI must prioritize centers such as the Basic Needs Center in order to ensure the welfare of students.



Denise Ramos-Vega
Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellow
UCI Basic Needs Center
February 2024