

A Study of Best Practices to Address
College-Student Homelessness & Housing Insecurity

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What is it?

In order to investigate and discuss college-student homelessness and housing insecurities, university administrations must first adopt definitions of these two classifications. There is no consistent, industry-wide definition for either (Dr. Crutchfield et al., p. 8, 2019). The analysis below will compare the scopes of the federal, state, and California Polytechnic State University definitions.

Student Housing Insecurity

Federal & #RealCollege Survey

The U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development set the federal definitions of ‘homelessness’ and ‘housing insecurity’ (S.Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019). A pioneering survey, called #RealCollege Survey, designed to study national levels of college-student basic needs, debuted the set of federal definitions for ‘homelessness’ and ‘housing insecurity’ as they apply to a college-student setting (N. Mortaloni & D. Boone, personal communication, May 29, 2020). This survey is the largest of its kind in the United States and publishes annual reports which outline the status of student basic needs on participating campuses throughout the nation (S. Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019). #RealCollege Survey states that, “Housing insecurity includes a broad set of challenges such as the inability to pay rent or utilities, or the need to move frequently.” (S.Goldrick-Rab et al., p.8, 2019). The respondent was considered ‘housing insecure’ if they considered their situation, in the last 12 months, to align with at least one of the 9 housing insecurity scenarios or “sectors” presented in the survey (see Figure 1).

California State University (CSU)

The California State University System is the entity in California which fosters basic needs initiatives among its 23 campuses and in doing so defines both ‘housing insecurity’ and ‘homelessness’ (Dr. Crutchfield et al., p. 8, 2019). The CSU Basic Needs Initiative included a state-wide survey of all 23 campuses to establish the state of student

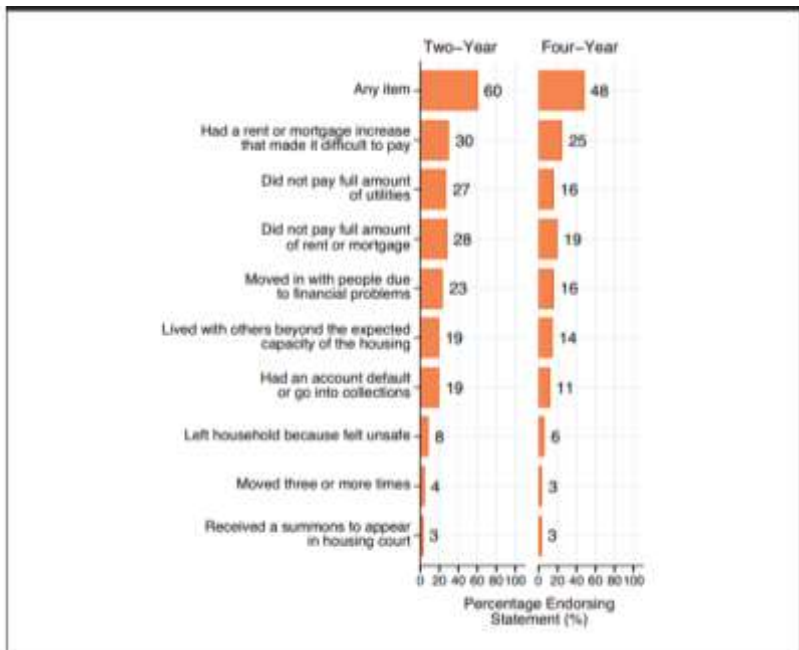


Figure 1: #RealCollege Survey 9 Housing Insecurity Sectors (S.Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019)

food and housing security. The survey defined housing insecurity as a temporary state of homelessness (Dr. Crutchfield and Dr. Maguire, 2017). The level of stability is directly linked to the frequency in which a student moves out of permanent housing during a set time (Dr. Crutchfield and Dr. Maguire, 2017). Alternative living accommodations were given to the respondents to select from as shown in Figure 2 (Dr. Crutchfield and Dr. Maguire, 2017). The options are derived from HUD and U.S. Department of Education classifications (Dr. Crutchfield and Dr. Maguire, p. 32, 2017).

- Students who were housing insecure as indicated by marking that they slept in one of the following places in the last 30-days or 12-months were selected for recruitment:
- a) At a shelter
 - b) In a camper
 - c) In transitional housing or independent living program
 - d) Outdoor location such as street, sidewalk, or alley, bus or train stop, campground or woods, park, beach, or riverbed, under bridge or overpass
 - e) In a closed area/space with a roof not meant for human habitation such as abandoned building, car or truck, van, RV, or camper, encampment or tent, or unconverted garage, attic, or basement
 - f) Temporarily staying with a relative, friend, or couch surfing until I find other housing
 - g) Temporarily at a hotel or motel without a permanent home to return to (not on vacation or business travel)
 - h) At a treatment center (such as detox, hospital, etc.)
 - i) At a group home such as halfway house or residential program for mental health or substance abuse

Figure 2: U.S. HUD/DoE Classifications
(Dr. Crutchfield and Dr. Maguire, 2017)

Cal Poly Basic Needs Initiative Taskforce (BNIT)

The Cal Poly Basic Needs Initiative Taskforce (BNIT) is an interdisciplinary team of administrators and faculty of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo which report findings on the status of students' basic needs including housing insecurity and homelessness (Dr. Nazmi et al., p. 3, 2018). According to the Cal Poly BNIT 2018 Report, student housing insecurity is defined as, "as having difficulty paying rent, moving frequently, living in overcrowded conditions, or doubling up with friends and relatives. In the college context, instability may take the form of frequently moving or changing residences due to lack of resources or eviction, or temporary or chronic couch surfing" (Dr. Nazmi et al., p. 3, 2018).

Student Homelessness

Federal & #RealCollege Survey

The #RealCollege Survey adopted the U.S. Department of Education definition of students who experience homelessness as, "individuals who lack a regular, fixed and adequate nighttime

residence” (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). This definition is detailed further in the McKinney-Vento Homelessness Assistance Act of 2009 (section 103). The department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines ‘homelessness’ more generally, “sheltered (in a HUD funded emergency shelter, transitional housing, and supportive housing) and unsheltered (on the streets, in abandoned buildings, or other places not meant for human habitation)” (Dr. Crutchfield and Dr. Maguire, 2017). This definition is detailed further in the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act of 2009 (Section 1003).

California State University (CSU)

The California State University System is the entity in California which implements basic needs initiatives among its 23 campuses and in doing so defines both ‘housing insecurity’ and ‘homelessness’ (Dr. Crutchfield et al., p. 8, 2019). The CSU Basic Needs Initiative included a state-wide survey of all 23 campuses to establish the state of student food and housing security. This survey alters the federal definitions as used in Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) terminology (Dr. Crutchfield and Dr. Maguire, 2017). The CSU recognized that the U.S. Department of Education created a definition which is more indicative to K-12 students while the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definition is too generalized (Dr. Crutchfield and Dr. Maguire, 2017). That said, the CSU Survey created specific scenarios which fall under the umbrella term of ‘homeless’. Respondents were asked to select which living settings they identify with.

Cal Poly Basic Needs Initiative Taskforce (BNIT)

According to the Cal Poly BNIT 2018 Report, student homelessness is defined as, “lack of a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence, characterized by living in motels, hotels or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations, or living in a car or other location not designated as a residence” (Dr. Nazmi et al., p. 3, 2018).

Considerations

While there is no consistent, industry-wide definition for either ‘college-student homelessness’ or ‘college-student housing insecurity’, there is a general consensus that ‘homelessness’ is a more severe state of the umbrella term that is ‘housing insecurity’. Where an individual crosses from one classification to the other is still up for debate. There is no federally legal definition which strictly addresses the unique situation of college-student housing insecurity. The #RealCollege Survey was the first to interpret the existing legislative classifications to better relate to college students. The #RealCollege Survey questions on housing insecurity and homelessness were focused on the student’s ability to financially afford and remain in stable housing. On the other hand, the California State University Survey’s questions on housing insecurity and homelessness focus on the residence typology. In both cases, the point at which an individual transitions from ‘housing insecure’ to ‘homeless’ is subjective and largely undefined. This distinction is important to make as the support systems in place for universities to receive competitive grant funding require data to prove enough need in each classification for an

investment to be made. All three institutions presented above focus on environmental factors in their efforts to define different levels of housing insecurity. This pursuit is difficult because living circumstances greatly vary from place to place and situation to situation. Furthermore, there are a multitude of disadvantages related to a wide variety of living circumstances which should be considered. It may be worth considering to transition away from an environmentally-based analysis, towards a student-based analysis where the actual physical and psychological effects of a particular housing circumstance are at the core of the classification definitions.

Ultimately, it is the political interpretations of these classifications, on a campus-by-campus basis, which drives the resource allocation, direction of effort, and scope of the solutions (B. Campbell, personal communication, June 24, 2020). For example, if a university administration believes that one of the homelessness sectors (*i.e.* living in a car) in the CSU Survey is in fact a 'lifestyle choice' rather than a 'housing insecurity', the data from the survey is politically nullified. Another, the CSU Survey didn't include displaced individuals (forced to live further from campus) in the classification of 'housing insecure' and if a university may want this group to be acknowledged as a disadvantaged demographic, then the survey data omits an important need. These examples point to how essential it is for institutions to find consensus on classification definitions.

On the California Polytechnic State University campus in San Luis Obispo, it is the Cal Poly Basic Needs Initiative Task Force which ultimately publishes the University's definitions. While the Taskforce has created their own definitions, they also accept the results from the 2018 CSU BNI Survey. This inconsistency may be a troubling deterrent for the Cal Poly Corporation and Cal Poly Administration to invest in solutions. It should be a priority of the Taskforce to build consensus on the Cal Poly Campus and to lobby any controversial inconsistencies between the CSU Survey definitions and their own so that the data is politically valid.

Who faces it?

Vulnerable Populations

When addressing student housing insecurity, it is important to identify the populations most at risk. According to the #RealCollege Survey, out of the 86,000 respondents nationwide in 2019, 56% reported being housing insecure at some point in the last year and 17% reported being homeless at some point during the previous year (S. Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019). In a study performed by the California Student Aid Commission during the 2018-2019 academic year, results found that 35% of college-students faced housing insecurity and 30% stated they did not have adequate resources to afford housing and utility costs while attending college (CSAC, 2019). Many studies recognize a higher rate of housing insecurity reported by students of color, especially among native american, black, and hispanic ethnicities (CSAC, 2019)(S. Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019). Furthermore, student members of the LGBTQ+ community experience greater ratings of housing insecurity and homelessness than their peers (S. Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019). In the #RealCollege Survey, 7% more LGBTQ+ students reported homelessness as

compared to their straight peers (S. Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019). Another demographic with disproportionate risk of homelessness are students with dependents who reported experiencing housing insecurity in the last 30 days 26% more than students without dependents (CSAC, 2019). Older students aged between 20-30 self-reported basic needs insecurity at 70% while their younger peers averaged 40% (S. Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019). The following college-student classifications have a statistically correlated greater risk for housing insecurity and homelessness (S. Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019):

- Students of color
- Students who identify as LGBTQ+
- Students with dependants
- Students over 26 years of age
- Students who were in foster care
- Students who have or are serving in the military
- Students who are employed during college
- Students who have been convicted of a crime
- Students who are first-generation college attendees
(Dr. Crutchfield and Dr. Maguire, 2017)
- Students with disabilities or medical conditions

Why should Cal Poly Care?

Ethical and practical benefits to addressing student housing insecurities and homelessness

Motivation to solve student homelessness on college campuses may originate along the spectrum of two perspectives: rational and ethical. A rational perspective university may look at housing insecurity as an individual and municipality responsibility disjointed from the college itself. However, there has been a recent effort to correlate basic needs insecurity with statistics that matter to the rational perspective such as academic performance and graduation rates.

The ethical perspective on the other hand looks at the issue as one the university can have a leading role in solving. Universities which adopt this approach may have active student leadership which fosters a grass-roots movement to find solutions to issues such as housing insecurity. This perspective cites improving student health and wellbeing as reasons to pursue development of supportive programs.

These perspectives do not have to operate in independently and can benefit from engaging with each other. According to a recent study, housing insecurity has a strong statistically supported

correlation with the following negative impacts on college students (Broton, 2017):

- College completion rates
- Academic and professional persistence
- Course Credit attainment
- Physical health
- Symptoms of depression
- Perceived stress

The list of negative effects may be prioritized differently by a rational administration versus an ethical one; however, as witnessed by many other CSU campuses, departments which serve students' basic needs can operate entirely funded by outside sources creating less of a burden on the administration at large. By capitalizing on student involvement, the scope of these departments can widen. Administrative departments which oversee academic performance and graduation rates as well as the university health department should coordinate efforts and resources to most effectively combat the variety of effects from student homelessness.

California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo Background

California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo is home to approximately 21,500 students and a variety of learn-by-doing majors (Cal Poly Census, 2019). The University has made efforts to tackle student basic needs after a university donor heard from a student who was struggling financially and had to skip meals (Dr. Joy Pedersen, personal conversation, January 17, 2020). This donor strictly wanted their donations to go towards student basic needs. This donor's mandate was the catalyst for the development of the CalPoly CARES program which also houses the CSU granted Basic Needs Initiative programs. Cal Poly CARES offers a few resources to help students in need (Dr. Joy Pedersen, personal conversation, January 17, 2020):



Figure 3: Cal Poly, SLO Student Population by Ethnicity (Cal Poly Census, 2019)

- 8 short-term emergency housing beds
- 4 long term beds
- Support of the campus food pantry
- Emergency case management

Furthermore, a new program initiated by the Financial Aid department works to fill the excess units on campus by providing low-income students who are not dependents with less than \$6,000 in contribution from family access to student grant funding for on-campus housing (Dr. Jo Campbell, personal conversation, February 3, 2020). This initiative supports Campus Housing, which is independently-

funded and competes with local off-campus housing options, to lower vacancy rates and

increase the number of students living on campus (Dr. Jo Campbell, personal conversation, February 3, 2020).

In 2016, Cal Poly was obligated to participate in a first-of-its-kind basic needs survey designed by the CSU (Clark, 2018). Results showed that approximately 10.9% of Cal Poly students struggled with student housing insecurity during the 12 months prior to taking the survey (Clark, 2018). Self-identified African American students faced housing insecurity at an approximately 8% higher rate than white students (Clark, 2018). In 2018, the survey was readministered by the CSU and concluded a 2% rise in students who faced housing insecurity at over 12% of the student body (Dr. Nazmi et al., p. 3, 2018). In this survey, "student homelessness" included living situations such as unpredictable couch-surfing and living out of vehicles (Clark, 2018). These statistics are not accepted by the Cal Poly administration at large, "I've seen the study of course, there's a lot of challenge of the data that it may not be 100% accurate based on the way some of the questions are worded" (Dr. Keith Humphry, personal conversation, January 27, 2020). Dr. Humphry who was representing the President and the department of Student Affairs specifically noted that they believe, "some of these students who choose to be homeless. They outfitted a van. We don't [think of them as homeless] either. Correct, right, [van life is an alternative to homelessness when they can't afford a house]. Some of those students have the resources to be able to afford housing but they just don't want to spend that money or build up any debt which I get, who wants to graduate college with more debt than you have to" (Dr. Keith Humphry, personal conversation, January 27, 2020). When asked if the administration conducted its own research and data collection based on homelessness and housing insecurity definitions accepted by the decision-makers, Dr. Humphry explained,

"we try every way we can to find things out [actual number of homeless students] so we do things like monitor the 24/7 space at the library, who's coming in every night, okay? Who comes into the rec center, and carries a duffel bag, goes into the locker room and comes out 25 minutes later. Are they coming in every day for a shower, right? We started to collect students' local addresses, you may have seen this pop up on your portal and found this very annoying, right? Some of the students have told us it's very annoying and say it's an invasion of privacy. We want to know where our students live off campus for many reasons, primarily for safety. If we have a wildfire, we almost had a wildfire a couple of years ago that blew right into the neighborhood, here, well we were like well who lives there, we don't know. If there's an earthquake if there's some sort of other disaster, we need to know, okay some of those are our students we want to get involved and help. Some of it also is we want to use the data and say, you didn't put in an address and have a high amount of financial aid, you didn't put in an address the quarter before. The data might suggest that you are showing signs of homelessness" (Dr. Keith Humphry, personal conversation, January 27, 2020).

The Vice President offered his personal best guess based on the data collection tactics expressed above, "So some folks are making choices so we know who those folks are. I would guess that the number is, of folks that are truly homeless, somewhere below 5% of our student

body” (Dr. Keith Humphry, personal conversation, January 27, 2020). This number, which is generally accepted campus-wide, informs the basic needs programs. The data is not published or recorded on any university platform or document because the administration avoids “assuming” that the particular behaviors flagged by the student affairs office means that the students are certainly suffering from housing insecurity (Dr. Keith Humphry, personal conversation, January 27, 2020).

It is clear that the Cal Poly Administration and Corporation have taken a rational perspective on the issue and argue that the University’s hands are tied in many ways because, “There’s federal regs on what we can give out to students and we can’t give away public resources, that’s against California law, we try to find ways to help that makes it easier” (Dr. Keith Humphry, personal conversation, January 27, 2020). If the university chooses adopts the findings from various studies which point to the correlation between student performance and level of housing insecurity, Cal Poly can invest time to collect real housing data and outreach on its students with the objective of increasing graduation rates, raising course performance, and lowering the burden on the campus health and wellbeing center. In support of this notion, there is a coalition of passionate advocates on Cal Poly Campus who want to identify the root cause to student homelessness and apply real solutions. This group is called the Basic Needs Taskforce and released a report in 2018 on the state of student basic needs insecurity (Dr. Nazmi et al., 2018). This task force of interested professors, staff, and CalPoly CARES program managers worked to compile recommendations for the Cal Poly Administration to act on; these recommendations can be seen below.

but represent a **high return on investment**, because once students are enrolled, they receive an average of \$150/month for groceries with little further input from Cal Poly. This directly addresses food insecurity and generates \$1.80 in the local community for every \$1 spent.

Efforts of Cal Poly's CalFresh Outreach program in 2016-18 resulted in **more than \$40,000 per month being generated in the local region**. For other services and programs, finding ways to decrease costs is critical — and may be simple. For example, the Food Pantry recently partnered with the Food Bank Coalition of San Luis Obispo, which **resulted in a savings of 75 percent on food**. Finally, **prevention must be prioritized** through a number of means, including early identification of at-risk students, rapid deployment of resources to alleviate acute food or housing insecurity, and advocacy at all levels, from grassroots movements to institutional and systemwide lobbying and policy making.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The chronic and potentially devastating nature of basic needs insecurity underscores the **need for an integrated basic needs infrastructure at Cal Poly**. To that end, the Cal Poly Basic Needs Task Force recommends the following actions that are suitable to an array of inter-sectoral partnerships.

1. Acknowledge the problem and scale of basic needs insecurity among Cal Poly students. **Unambiguously commit** to efforts designed to alleviate, prevent and study food and housing insecurity. Define food and housing security as a fundamental right for all Cal Poly students.
2. Create a dedicated student-centered physical space explicitly for basic needs infrastructure and support.
 - a. **Accessing help must be quick and painless.** Creating an integrated Basic Needs Hub for basic needs services and resources would streamline access to resources, refer students more quickly and effectively to the proper channels, and decrease misconceptions about which services are available and to whom. This model would also contribute to sustainability, as programs may evolve over time, but a central nucleus would remain a one-stop shop. To improve access and contribute to normalization of the issues, a highly visible physical space (e.g. in the University Union) would house the Hub and be coupled with intensive marketing. A dedicated, specially trained full-time staff member plus part-time student staff and interns would serve to run the facility, offering Learn by Doing opportunities for student staff/interns. For the 2018-19 academic year, the Cal Poly Basic Needs Task Force, in conjunction with Campus Health and Wellbeing, have secured two full-time AmeriCorps volunteers in an effort to begin coordination of basic needs-related efforts, but a longer-term plan is needed.

- b. **Develop a strong Cal Poly Basic Needs online presence**, including a centralized website with information about resources, plus links to various programs, resources and key contacts. Create an opt-in mailing list whereby students can receive basic needs information on an ongoing basis. Coordinating with existing resources such as diverse Cal Poly social networks and the Cal Poly mobile app is also recommended to make this information easier to access. For the 2018-19 academic year, the Cal Poly Basic Needs Task Force has secured funds, albeit limited and short-term, from the CSU Chancellor's Office (Hunger-Free Campus grant) that will serve to initiate some of these efforts.
- 3. **Normalize and destigmatize, create a positive and inclusive climate for all students.**

 - a. **Increasing visibility of the issues** and decreasing the associated shame, fear and stigma is a matter of campus culture. As such, core programs such as WOW, SLO Days, and other student orientation and transition programs offer valuable opportunities for introducing and normalizing the food and housing issues to promote dialogue and visibility in the student population. These issues are relevant to all students and will become major hurdles to many over the course of their time at Cal Poly. Staff members of large-scale programs such as academic support centers should also be trained on how to identify students with potential basic needs problems. Venues such as campus residence halls, recreation centers, and libraries are also high-density areas useful for promotion and marketing efforts.
 - b. **Breaking taboos.** Financial aid is typically not a taboo subject, but food insecurity and homelessness remain extremely sensitive topics, even among friends. Several thousand Cal Poly students experience basic needs insecurity, and studies show that their social and mental health suffers. They feel disenfranchised, shame, stigma and fear. Many do not know where to turn. Raising awareness and normalizing the issues can help ensure that students know where to go for help or where to refer their friends who may be experiencing problems. Research and action in this area is urgently needed and must be prioritized.
- 4. **Focus on equity.** Some groups experience significantly higher rates of basic needs insecurity. Creating an inclusive campus means **ensuring that all people get the type of help that is right for them**. Groups at higher risk need more support. While campus-level marketing approaches may be useful for visibility and awareness-building, targeted approaches are warranted for known at-risk groups such as first-generation students, students of color, Pell Grant recipients, former foster youth, EOP students, DACA students, and Dreamers. By tapping into existing on-campus networks and mechanisms to offer support, high-risk students may more effectively and quickly access needed resources.

5. Capitalize on partnerships to unify existing efforts and create new ones.
- a. **Tap into the power and efforts of student groups.** Learning about what students need, how they utilize resources, and how they prefer to utilize them will ensure that new efforts are well suited to needs. Partnerships with ASI, student clubs, Greek life, and internal and external student advocacy groups would benefit planning, strategy and marketing efforts.
 - b. **The Cal Poly Food Pantry was founded by students** and is one of the most successful basic needs programs on campus. It, and other fruitful student-led efforts, must be highlighted and nurtured into new phases of growth. Students and student government should feel empowered and supported to initiate change and pilot new programs.
 - c. **Faculty and staff** are excellent resources and advocates for students. Mechanisms for engaging them represent a great opportunity for basic needs efforts. For example, faculty members across the country have incorporated basic needs language and resources into course syllabi. Basic needs trainings for faculty/staff should be offered and promoted on campus.
 - d. **Expand existing successful programs, develop new ones.**
 - i. Mustang Meal Share allows students with meal plans to donate up to 10 meals for food insecurity programming. This program should be aggressively marketed to students, as initial trials have shown promise. It may be expanded to include other mechanisms such as online giving. Faculty/staff may be receptive to donating meals for students. Moreover, the current limit of donating 10 meals should be eliminated in favor of an unlimited number of meals.
 - ii. CalFresh Outreach helps thousands of students and enrolls hundreds for benefits. However, there is no location on campus where these dollars can be used. Relatively simple efforts, such as accepting CalFresh EBT cards at the two campus market locations, would be an important step toward improving food accessibility for many students.
 - iii. Students utilizing Emergency Housing should be provided basic home needs such as towels, sheets, utensils, and basic cooking tools to facilitate transition.
 - iv. Other CSU campuses have initiated food recovery programs through which extra food from campus dining and events are made available to students, providing a useful resource and simultaneously reducing food waste.
 - e. **Leverage local connections.** The Cal Poly partnership with the Food Bank Coalition of SLO County has saved the Food Pantry 50 percent on food. Monthly public food bank food distributions began in April 2018 (23 distributions at first event), with the Cal Poly Food Pantry staff assisting and the CalFresh Outreach team present to answer questions about enrollment. Another collaboration under development is a concept for public events that would include free food coupled with high-impact marketing to increase awareness of food and housing insecurity issues and resources. The richness of Cal Poly's food and agricultural resources

and programs (e.g. Cal Poly farms, food and the College of Agriculture, Food, and Environmental Sciences) could be leveraged for material support and to increase visibility of partnerships.

- f. **Support CSU, California, and national-level collaborations** to learn from the experiences of other institutions/systems and leverage larger-scale programmatic and research efforts. The California Higher Education Basic Needs Alliance, for example, unites the California Community College, CSU and UC systems to build bridges to addressing basic needs insecurity among their three million students. Similarly, faculty across several university systems nationwide are engaged in research collaborations that have extraordinary reach and influence. A CSU-level basic needs research initiative was developed in 2018. Travel to meetings, pilot research studies, and networking opportunities should be supported by the university and the CSU Chancellor’s Office. Cal Poly faculty and staff hold key leadership roles in these efforts, which should be recognized as critical to building effective initiatives at Cal Poly.
6. **Build a stronger evidence base by evaluating programs and undertaking new research.** College basic needs insecurity is not well researched, and existing programs at Cal Poly are not thoroughly evaluated. Without data, we are in the dark about which programs are most effective, among whom, and how to improve our efforts. Current efforts **must be evaluated. Research is urgently needed** in the following areas: basic needs security and resource utilization; academic success and degree completion associated with basic needs; how to normalize and destigmatize the issues among students; and how state and national policies impact basic needs. Data is needed to move forward in an evidence-based manner. Nascent but promising research collaborations should be supported by the university and the CSU Chancellor’s Office in the form of funding and facilitating collaborations.
 7. **Advocate for our students.**
 - a. The power of Cal Poly and the CSU is significant in Sacramento and Washington, D.C., and must be harnessed to **lobby on behalf of students’ basic needs**. From grassroots student groups to campus and CSU leadership, we **should be consistently pushing for improvements** in policy related to basic needs.
 - b. **Effective policies** to help students succeed ensure a healthy workforce and vibrant economy. Decades ago, this thinking led to the National School Lunch Program for elementary and secondary education. Higher education students and their basic needs, however, are not effectively supported. There is an **urgent need for better policies** to this end.
 - i. Example: As a full-time college student, it is exceedingly difficult to qualify for SNAP/CalFresh, and one of the more common “student exemptions” is working 20 hours per week, which is not feasible for most students. Changing policy to count “credit or unit-hours” as “work hours” would effectively qualify most students in need, making an immediate and significant positive impact on food insecurity among college students.

- c. University and CSU political liaisons should be familiar with ongoing policy-level activities associated with basic needs in higher education and communicate developments and discuss opportunities with the Basic Needs Task Force.
8. **Fundraise.** Giving to basic needs efforts should be highlighted as an opportunity for donors who may wish to support Cal Poly students toward academic success. Fundraising efforts for student basic needs is an **exceptional opportunity for fundraising.**

The **Cal Poly Basic Needs Task Force** pledges to take concerted action toward eliminating basic needs insecurity on campus by focusing on the above issues, as well as communicating our efforts, sharing resources, and engaging partners.

In spite of considerable challenges, the **CSU system and Cal Poly are among the national leaders** when it comes to examining and addressing basic needs initiatives¹³. However, there is still much to be learned about the causes and consequences of food and housing insecurity, and how to appropriately, equitably and sustainably address these problems on our campus and throughout the nation.

¹³ Synopsis of #RealCollege: A National Convening on College Food and Housing Insecurity 2017. <http://wihopelab.com/events/realcollege.html>

Best Practices

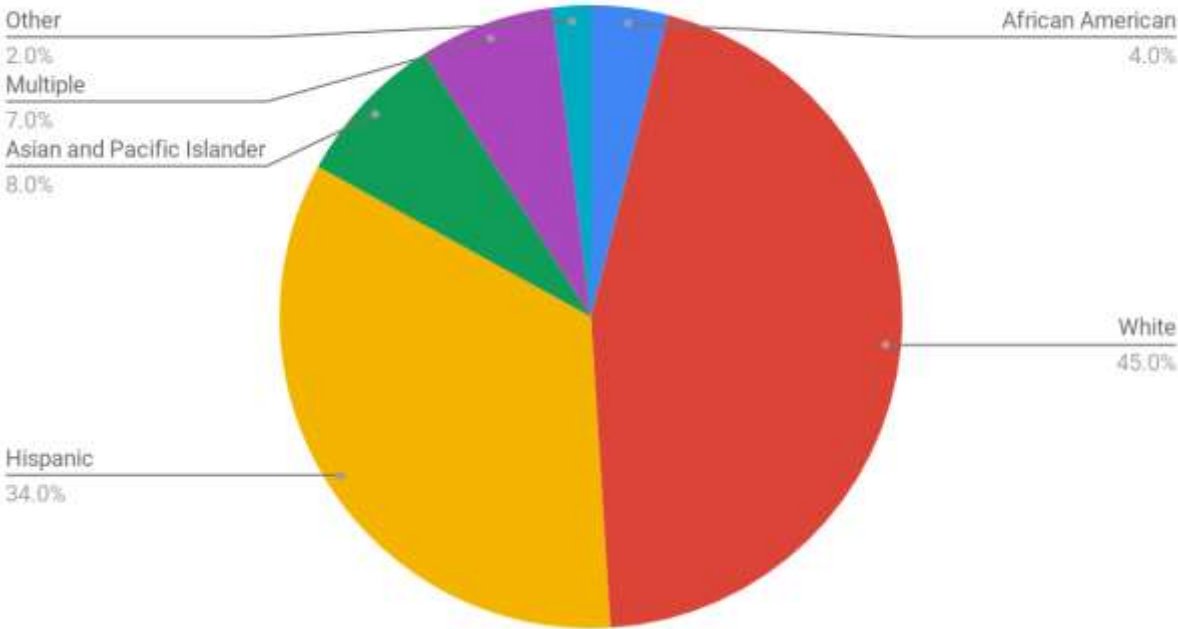
The following section examines one community college and three California State University campuses and their activism in addressing student basic needs, particularly housing insecurity.

Mira Costa College

University Characteristics

Mira Costa College is a community college which serves approximately 16,000 students annually across its two campuses in north-county San Diego (MiraCosta, n.d.). The college is host to a diverse student population with an average age of 26 years old and including approximately 1,400 active duty military and veterans (MiraCosta, n.d.).

MiraCosta Student Demographics by Ethnicity



MiraCosta offers a wide-range of student services including various financial, counseling, professional development, accessibility, equity, and wellbeing support (MiraCosta, n.d.). The college also supports a CARE team with two full-time employees and additional supportive part-time staff as well as many student and community volunteers (MiraCosta, n.d.). The two full-time employees are both licensed clinical social workers and have experience serving disadvantaged populations in the community (N. Mortaloni & D. Boone, personal communication, May 29, 2020). The CARE program at MiraCosta began over 8 years ago as an organic student initiative, with community support, and administrative facilitation (N. Mortaloni & D. Boone, personal communication, May 29, 2020). The Basic Needs Workgroup is made up of

representatives from the student body, the CARE Team, faculty, and the administration (N. Mortaloni & D. Boone, personal communication, May 29, 2020).

Best Practices

Student Empowerment

In recognition of the original student campaign which led to the creation of the Basic Needs Workgroup, the MiraCosta administration empowers the continually engaged student leaders to participate in basic needs issues and solutions. Regularly engaged students and staff may lead to greater awareness of the issues and the support systems in place. In addition, leveraging community knowledge on campus allows for a more robust and inclusive discussion on basic needs topics.

Basic Needs Advocacy and Involvement

One of the CARE Team's primary functions is to act as a bridge between existing basic needs community organizations such as food, financial, health, and housing services (N. Mortaloni & D. Boone, personal communication, May 29, 2020). However, the Team not only builds relationships with local organizations but actively engages in local democracy to represent the needs of the students they serve (N. Mortaloni & D. Boone, personal communication, May 29, 2020). For example, the CARE Team spoke at a local city council meeting in support of a controversial project to create a safe parking lot in the City of Encinitas (N. Mortaloni & D. Boone, personal communication, May 29, 2020). In part by engaging with local decision-making processes and voicing the basic needs of their students, the Team was able to help the measure pass and open a new resource to serve their students.

The CARE Team actively participates in basic needs workgroups and think-tanks such as the California Higher Education Basic Needs Alliance (N. Mortaloni & D. Boone, personal communication, May 29, 2020). By attending conferences, studying research, and engaging in collaborative workgroups with other CARE programs across the State, MiraCosta is better situated to implement innovative strategies to address basic needs.

Survey Participation and Internal Data Collection

The CARE Team seeks opportunities to participate in basic needs surveys such as the #RealCollege Survey in order to grow a database on the needs of their students (N. Mortaloni & D. Boone, personal communication, May 29, 2020). In addition to administering external research surveys, the Basic Needs Workgroup helped in the creation of an internal, campus-wide survey (N. Mortaloni & D. Boone, personal communication, May 29, 2020). Prior to registration, each student is required to take a survey which includes answering questions based on their basic needs in the past 12 months (N. Mortaloni & D. Boone, personal communication, May 29, 2020). Over time, this data can be analyzed to understand the nature of basic needs on campus as well as justify the funding of the CARE Team and student services. The Team plans to compile the various survey data as well as data representing the services provided and students served year-to-year in an effort to create longitudinal perspective on the successes of their programs.

Campus Education and Referral Program

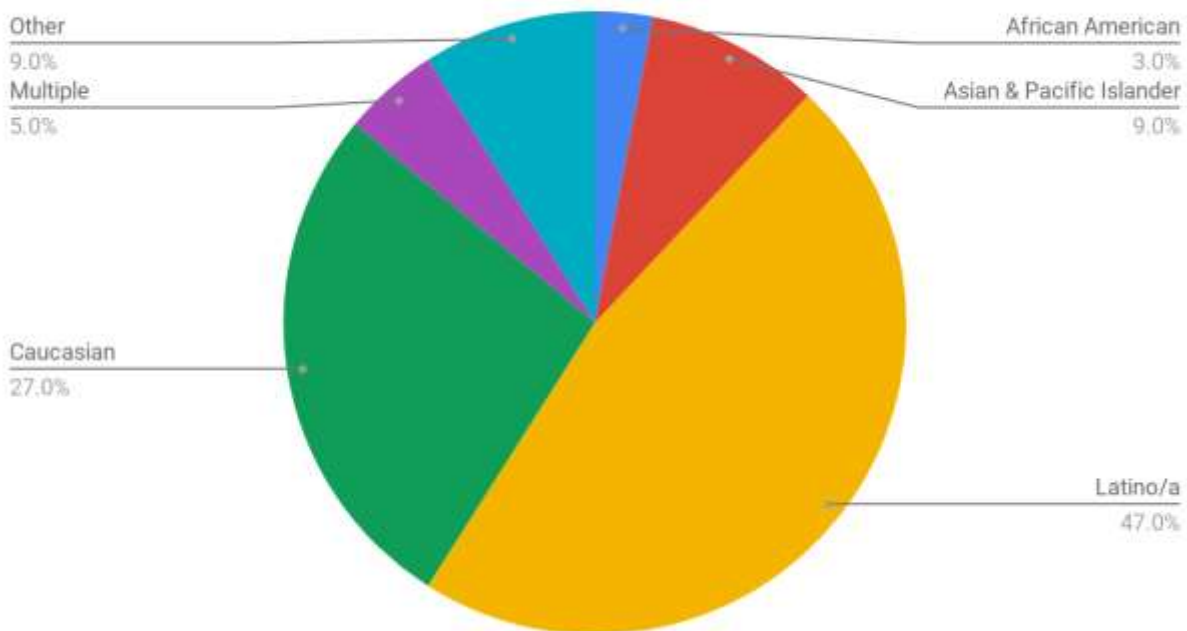
The Basic Needs Workgroup has created flyers which represent data of campus basic needs challenges as well as directions to find assistance in dealing with these challenges. The CARE Team also has a digital platform where resources and direct contact information is made available through the MiraCosta website. The Team also manages a referral program which allows for anyone to refer a student or staff member to a case manager anonymously.

CSU San Marcos

University Characteristics

The 20th California State University campus opened its doors to students the year of 1989 in San Marcos, California (CSU, n.d.). Today, the campus is host to approximately 14,500 students (CSUSM, 2019). The diverse student body has access to a variety of student support services (CSUSM, 2019).

CSUSM Student Demographics by Ethnicity



Most student services are housed within the Cougar Care Network under the direction of the Dean of Students (CSUSM, n.d.). The Cougar Care Network materialized in order to create an institution to foster and actualize solutions to the student body's basic needs as identified by the Associated Students Incorporated (ASI) (Bonnie Campbell, personal conversation, June 24, 2020). ASI initiated a campaign to start a food pantry to serve their food insecure peers throughout campus. This effort was successful in part thanks to the empowerment from and

cooperation of the administration. Shortly after the creation of the food pantry, the campus administration decided to centralize the student services under the Cougar Care Network (Bonnie Campbell, personal conversation, June 24, 2020). While the student leaders on campus continue to manage and grow the food pantry and CalFresh programs, they also offer guidance and set basic needs goals with the Cougar Care staff to combat other insecurities including housing (Bonnie Campbell, personal conversation, June 24, 2020). Today, the Cougar Care Network connects students in need of support to the plethora of services offered by the Dean of Students: Centers for Learning and Academic Success Services, Disability Support Services (DSS), Personalized Academic Success Services (PASS), Special Groups (ACE, CAMP, DSS, EOP, FYOB, PASO, TRIO SSS, Veterans), Student Health and Counseling Services, Title IX/Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation, and the University Police Department (CSUSM, n.d.).

Best Practices

Student Empowerment

The initial, receptive attitude of the California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) administration towards the student leaders voicing their basic need insecurities fostered a productive and inclusive relationship between the Associated Students Incorporated (ASI) and what would become the Cougar Care Network. By taking a more supportive approach and allowing the student leaders to continuously engage with basic needs decision-making and goal-setting, the Cougar Care Network was able to maximize the scope and capacity of its initiatives in part by empowering the students with resources and clearance to solve certain insecurities on campus.

Basic Needs Advocacy and Involvement

The California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) administration does more than allow students to pursue solutions to solving basic needs insecurities. They also apply their staff and faculty to engage with the California State University (CSU) system, on-campus housing partners, basic needs researchers, and local community service organizations. In 2019, three faculty from CSUSM applied for and received mini-grants to research basic needs on campus which provided data for Associated Students Incorporated (ASI) and the Cougar Care Network (CCN) to make informed decisions (CSU Mini-Grant, 2019). Furthermore, the CCN actively seeks to capitalize on available funding from the CSU, local government, and donors. To achieve this, staff will apply for every grant opportunity available through the CSU including the most recent Rapid Re-Housing Pilot Program. Although they were ultimately not chosen as one of the seven campuses to receive funding to implement rapid-rehousing, the CCN went ahead and pursued an ambitious emergency housing program. CSUSM has a contractual partnership with a college-housing provider for their on-campus dorms. The CCN leveraged the relationship with their on-campus housing partner as well as a local community non-profit to seamlessly create an emergency housing program that not only provides emergency shelter but facilitates re-housing through community housing organizations. The university also values data-driven program management and implementation. Although the CCN is looking into developing an in-house basic needs survey, they currently rely on data collected from participating in external

studies such as the National College Health Assessment and #Real College surveys. These opportunities are often sought after by CCN staff and campus faculty since they are essentially free to implement and voluntary to participate. Finally, the CCN has developed long-standing relationships with local philanthropists, alumni, and campus supporters who often donate resources for specific projects outlined by the CNN staff. For instance, the CCN started an emergency student-relief fund which targets financially unstable students who do not qualify for other institutional relief programs such as federal aid programs. This fund is entirely donor based and has a real, direct, positive impact on student wellbeing and success. Recently, due to the COVID-19 crisis, this emergency fund was crucial for many students at CSUSM and record applicants have been assisted through this program.

Campus Education and Referral Program

California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) Cougar Care Network (CCN) prioritizes campus education as part of their program growth. With a goal of addressing every student's basic needs, the CCN works hard to increase accessibility, transparency, and awareness of available resources on campus. The CCN and student leaders have been largely successful in this endeavor. The CCN was inaugurated in the 2015-2016 academic year where 500 students were served. In the 2018-2019 academic year, approximately 1,500 cases were served. As the CCN programs have expanded, so has its capacity. During the fall and winter quarters of the 2019-2020 academic year, already 3,000 cases were served and many more are expected during spring and summer quarters due to the COVID-19 effect on student basic needs insecurities. The CCN attributes its rapid increases in cases to its positive relationship with Associated Students Incorporated (ASI) as well as its faculty education and referral program. The faculty at CSUSM are made aware of the CCN benefits and many choose to provide resource information in their syllabi. Furthermore, the referral program allows peers, faculty, and staff to recommend students to seek assistance through the CCN. The referred students are then connected with the appropriate case manager and offered assistance to meet the individuals needs.

Centralized Student Services and Case Management

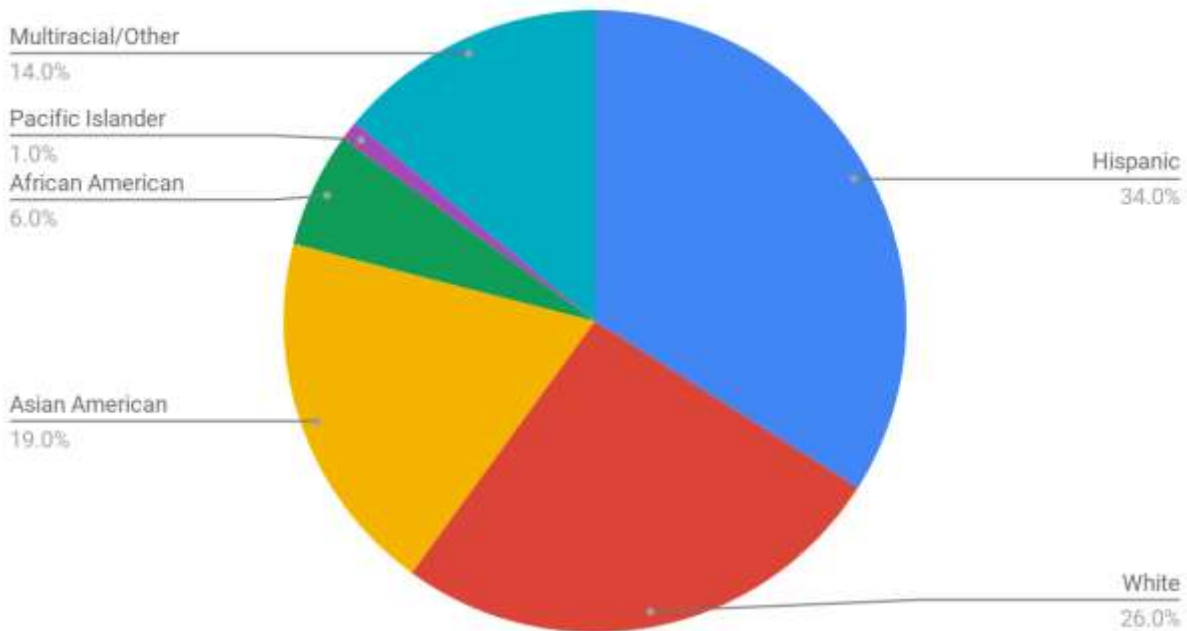
The Cougar Care Network's (CCN) institutional organization and accessibility allows for seamless connection between student and campus resources as well as optimized program development. CCN houses all of the campus student support services including basic needs case management and services. Housing all of the student services in a central location makes it easy for students to approach the 'one-stop-shop' for assistance. Not only are the services located together on campus, but the contact information, phone, email, and website, for the CCN is shared and centralized so students may reach out and expect to be connected to the correct services. The campus is also host to unique on-campus services like showers and 24hr zone in the university library which has a community kitchen. The overall centralization of all student services increases collaboration between departments and may help make a student in need feel less intimidated to ask for help.

CSU Sacramento

University Characteristics

California State University Sacramento is host to approximately 31,000 students and is known to have one of the most diverse student bodies in the western United States (Sacramento State, 2019).

CSUS Student Demographics by Ethnicity



The CARES program on campus evolved from the Student Affairs office which processed health and wellbeing (Jessica Thomas, personal conversation, July 8, 2020). At the time when student basic needs were added to the responsibilities of the office, there was a single case manager (Jessica Thomas, personal conversation, July 8, 2020). Since then, the CARES program has hired another certified social worker to help provide crisis assistance and resource education to the student body (Jessica Thomas, personal conversation, July 8, 2020). In order to maximize potential grant funding and finance streamlining, the CARES program has adopted the homelessness and housing insecure definitions from the State Housing Finance Agency under the U.S. Housing and Urban Development (Jessica Thomas, personal conversation, July 8, 2020). The adoption of these definitions drive on-campus research and help provide statistics which help validate the predicted need for funding. Ultimately, the office is independently financed by grants and donations, costing nothing to the university (Jessica Thomas, personal conversation, July 8, 2020).

Best Practices

Increasing Scope and Capacity through Partnerships

CSUS participates in external surveys like the #RealCollege survey and accepts the CSU-wide survey results (Jessica Thomas, personal conversation, July 8, 2020). With the data collected from the surveys, CARES program works closely with the CSUS Office of Research to analyze the results (Jessica Thomas, personal conversation, July 8, 2020). Furthermore, the CARES program successfully applied for grant funding through the CSU Rapid Re-Housing pilot program. With CSU support, CSUS has formalized a relationship with a local re-housing organization. By partnering with a specialized community organization, the CARES program has increased its scope and capacity to serve the student body. Emergency housing is sometimes provided by local hotels through a memorandum of understanding (Jessica Thomas, personal conversation, July 8, 2020). The CARES staff also regularly participate in a CSU Case Managers group which shares best practices and lessons learned (Jessica Thomas, personal conversation, July 8, 2020). In addition, the CARES office regularly reaches out to campus faculty and staff to educate about the available resources and referral program (Jessica Thomas, personal conversation, July 8, 2020). Partnership with student leaders and ASI has also increased capacity and provided an outlet for education to the student body.

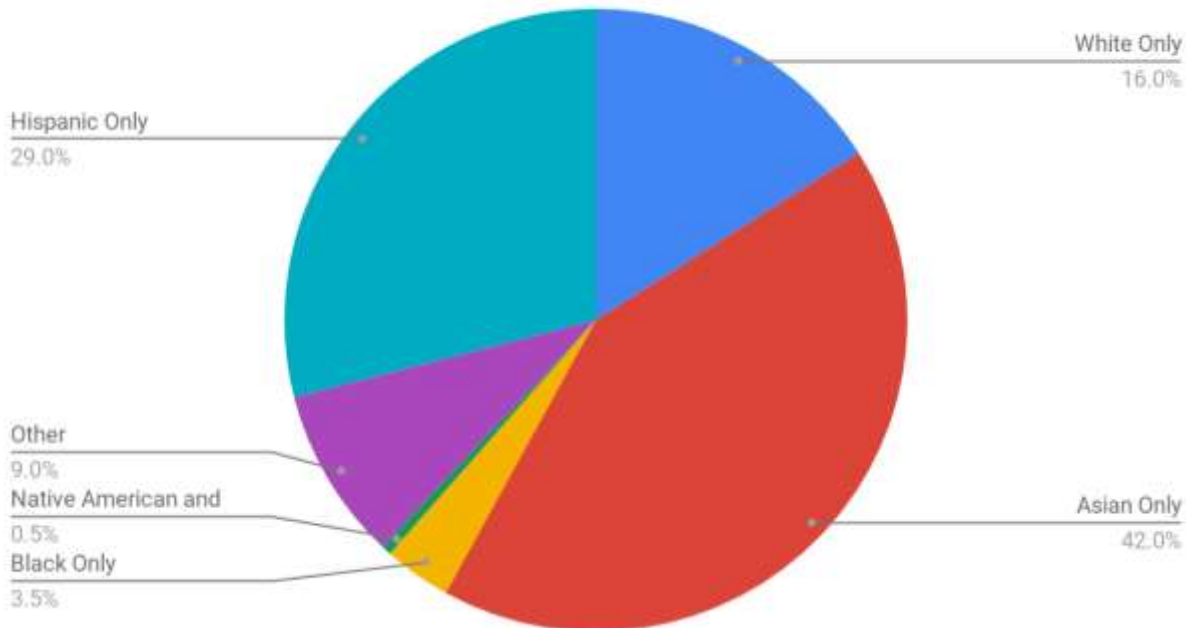
CSU San Jose

University Characteristics

San Jose State University (SJSU) describes itself as 'Silicon Valley's Public University' to associate the campus with the innovative technology hub of California. Host to approximately 30,000 students in 2019 (SJSU Institutional Research, 2019), SJSU has great potential to satisfy the basic needs of its diverse student body. In 2015, the university took its first step to achieve this goal. The Economic Crisis Response Team developed out of the behavioral and mental health support center with a goal of assisting students who face financial hardships (Ben Falter, personal conversation, July 20, 2020). Naturally, this team investigated basic needs such as food and housing insecurity and created a formal department associated with the CSU CARES initiative to bridge students to basic needs providers and available community resources (Ben Falter, personal conversation, July 20, 2020). In 2019, the department formed The Basic Needs Advisory Council which consists of campus administrators, faculty, community expertise, and student representatives (Ben Falter, personal conversation, July 20, 2020). This council sets the CARES basic needs goals, promotes CARES initiatives, and facilitates cooperation and partnerships through networking with the various basic needs stakeholders. During the 2019-2020 academic year, 624 students requested assistance and approximately 52% marked 'housing/homelessness resources' as one of their reasons for requesting assistance (SJSU CARES, 2020). SJSU is recognized as a progressive and effective campus in dealing with student basic needs issues such as housing security. The university regularly applies and has received CSU mini-grant opportunities to study basic needs and has been selected for the CSU Rapid Re-Housing pilot program. SJSU CARES' guiding principle is to

“listen, incorporate, and elevate student voices” (Ben Falter, personal conversation, July 20, 2020).

SJSU Student Demographics by Ethnicity



Best Practices

Internal Data Collection and Survey Participation

The San Jose State University CARES team follows a philosophy of empirically driven problem identification which directly translates to its belief in the importance of campus-specific data collection and research. This style of operation is a product of the early years of the CARES operation where the university administration expressed skepticism towards the CSU Basic Needs survey. The CARES team also believed the design of the CSU survey to be insubstantial and lacked crucial questions which could provide a holistic perspective of the students facing food and housing insecurity (Ben Falter, personal conversation, July 20, 2020). However, the resulting motivation from the CARES team to conduct its own research on this issue was not shared by the campus administration. Ultimately, it was the responsibility of SJSU CARES to create a grand proposal in an effort to convince the administration to support the expansion of its scope of operation and to introduce new basic needs initiatives on campus. This proposal was successful in part to its empirical basis and the fact that the CARES team identified campus space and grant opportunities to support the basic needs efforts (SJSU Student Hunger Committee, 2018). The CARES team intends to continue pocket surveys and focus groups as well as introducing a campus-wide, comprehensive basic needs survey come Fall of 2020 (Ben Falter, personal conversation, July 20, 2020). This new survey is designed to identify the specific underlying issues with students facing basic needs insecurities, the prevalence of such insecurities, and the cross-sectional relationship to basic needs and demographic

characteristics (Ben Falter, personal conversation, July 20, 2020). This survey is intended to be repeated and directly comparative from year-to-year. University support is largely thanks to funding availability made by AB74 and the heightened insecurity due to COVID-19 ramifications on the student body.

Basic Needs Advocacy and Partnerships

In an effort to increase the CARES team, local government, and local basic needs provider collaboration, SJSU CARES led a team of stakeholders in what was called the 100 Days Challenge in 2019 (Ben Falter, personal conversation, July 20, 2020). The challenge was for the group of stakeholders to house 100 housing-insecure college-students in 100 days (SJSU CARES, 2020). The group was successful in housing 117 students in the 100 days and in doing so raised awareness of the issue and further developed relationships between the partnering organizations such as the Bill Wilson Center. The CARES team applied and was successful in receiving CSU grants to pilot a rapid re-housing program on SJSU campus. This funding went towards the 100 Days Challenge as well as creating a permanent partnership with the Bill Wilson Center which will now operate at a physical location on campus to connect housing-insecure students with emergency and long-term housing. Furthermore, the CARES team operates in direct collaboration with student leaders and does so in a transparent fashion by updating its website with published documents and annual basic needs reports. SJSU solution finding takes advantage of a uniquely designed process which represents the diverse student body and the various basic needs issues as a result of student, local government, and community partnerships.

Potential Best Practice Implementation at Cal Poly, SLO

Identified Best Practices	Does Cal Poly Actively do This?
Case Management & Referral Program	Yes
Student Empowerment	No
Basic Needs Advocacy & Involvement	No
Survey Participation	No
Internal Data Collection	No
Centralized Student Services & Campus Education	No
Increase Scope & Capacity through Partnerships	No

Along with implementing the various recommendations by the Cal Poly Basic Needs Taskforce, Cal Poly administration should learn from other California institutions that have had great successes in addressing student housing insecurity. The chart above highlights particularly suitable and effective best practices which Cal Poly can continue to support or look to

implement. However, to begin addressing this issue it is necessary to solidify infrastructure to build upon. The following three steps are identified during this research as priorities for Cal Poly administration:

- 1) First and foremost, the Cal Poly administration should work to empower the Basic Needs Taskforce as the resident-experts on campus regarding student housing insecurity and homelessness. In doing so, the administration should adopt the Task Force's definitions of student housing insecurity and homelessness in order to establish referenceable technical language and to accurately identify the issue to be researched and understood.
- 2) Second, it may be of interest to the Cal Poly administration to consolidate the Campus Health and Wellbeing Center and the Student Services Center into a centralized department. Greater collaboration between the two departments would encourage a public health approach to student academic success. Furthermore, it would provide opportunity to investigate the real connections between wellbeing and academics. Finally, a shared physical location for the case managers at a centralized organization may promote student access and knowledge of where to find help and the availability of assistance that can be provided.
- 3) Third, the Cal Poly CARES department and Basic Needs Task Force should actively pursue and participate in existing initiatives. This would include attending the multiplicity of CSU, Statewide, and National student basic needs case manager conferences and workgroups to learn how to implement best practices from universities across the board. In addition, Cal Poly should take advantage of the organizations like #RealCollege Survey and California State University Grants to access free research opportunities to begin understanding the parameters of the housing challenges at Cal Poly.

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