

Food Security at UCSF

Spring 2015
Student Survey



Introduction

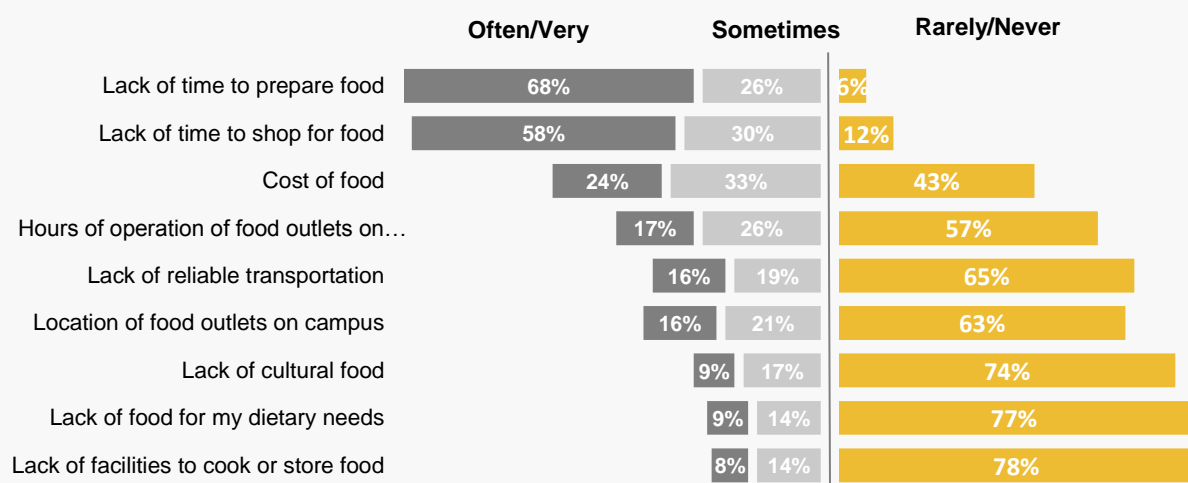
As part of the University of California Global Food Initiative that aims at ensuring students on UC campuses have food security while taking on the bigger issue of hunger around the world, a food security survey was administered at UCSF by the University of California Office of the President (UCOP) to 2,984 students enrolled in the spring quarter 2015. Nine hundred and twenty one anonymous responses were received, yielding a response rate of 31%. The survey results provide a portrait of the scope of food security issues on campus and contextual information for the Food Security for Students (FSFS) pilot program led by Student Academic Affairs to support food access for our students.

Survey Findings

Concerns over Food Cost

When asked about factors that made it hard for them to get the food they wanted, students ranked “lack of time to prepare food” (68% often/very often), “lack of time to shop for food” (58% often/very often), and “cost of food” (24% often/very often) as the top three on the list, as shown in Figure 1 below.

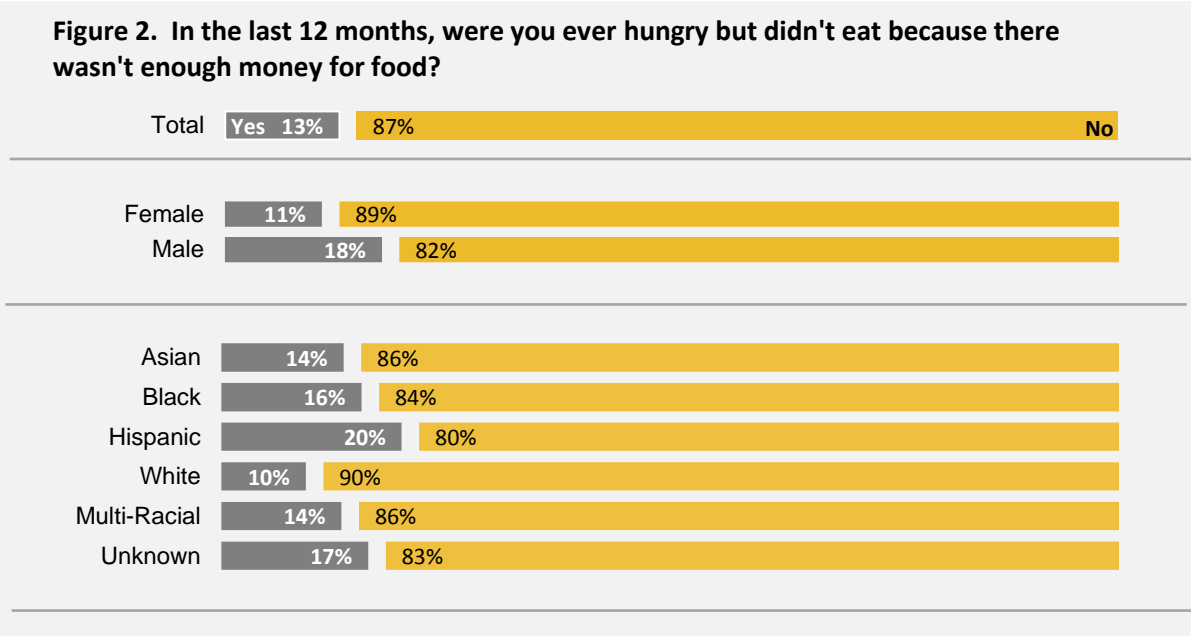
Figure 1. How often has each of the following circumstances made it hard for you to get the food that you wanted during the current quarter?



While the students’ lack of time to shop and prepare food could draw some explanation from the intense and challenging curricula of our graduate and professional programs, their concerns over food cost were largely related to other financial pressures they were facing. For students who stated that the cost of food often or very often prevented them from getting what they wanted, choices had to be made between paying for food and paying for medical care (10% every month/some months during the year), housing (19%), socializing (17%), or educational expenses (26%). These students coped with their food shortage by cutting the size of their meals or skipping meals (20% every month/some months during the year), asking family or friends for help (24%), or buying the cheapest food available knowing that it wasn’t the healthiest (52%).

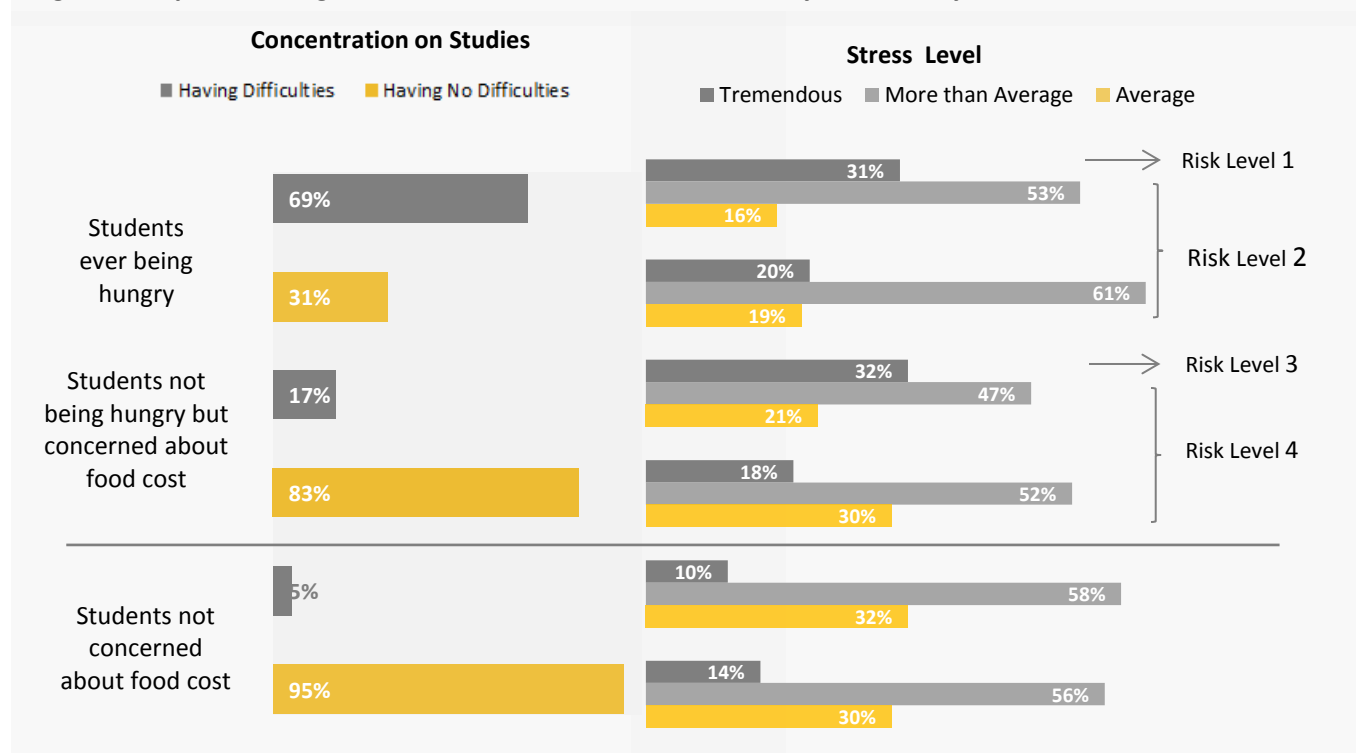
The Issue of Hunger

Thirteen percent of the respondents reportedly went hungry at one point in the last 12 months because there wasn’t enough money for food. Figure 2 below shows the gender and race/ethnicity breakdown of students who suffered from hunger. Higher percentages of Hispanic, black, and Asian students experienced hunger compared to white students.



The consequences of hunger were difficulties to concentrate on studies and high levels of stress. As revealed in Figure 3, 69% of the students who reported ever being hungry had difficulty concentrating on their studies (4% every month during the year, 27% some months during the year, and 38% a few times during the year), as compared to only 5% among students who were not concerned about food cost. Furthermore, among those who went hungry and also had difficulty focusing on their studies, 31% rated their overall level of stress in the last year as “tremendous,” again much higher than that of students who were not concerned about food cost.

Figure 3. Impact of Hunger and concerns over food cost on study and anxiety level.



For this group of students, three risk factors – being hungry, having difficulty concentrating on studies, and having high anxiety levels – were present. The study indicates that, although these students account for only 3% of the survey respondents, this is a high-risk population that needs to be reached and provided with relief as soon as possible.

Identify At-Risk Groups

The survey revealed groups of students at different levels of risk in terms of food security, based on the three risk factors of hunger, difficulty concentrating on studies, and very high stress level. As shown in Figure 3, the most at-risk (Risk Level 1) are the 3% of students who suffered from hunger and whose hunger interfered with their studies and further heightened their anxiety. The Risk Level 2 group is the 10% of students who experienced hunger, but not the other two risk factors simultaneously.

Of the students who didn't go hungry but nonetheless couldn't get the food they wanted due to cost, 17% reported that there were times when they couldn't concentrate on studies, much higher than the 5% for students who had no concerns over food cost, and 32% further considered themselves as having tremendous stress. These are the Risk Level 3 students, who account for about 1% of all students. Other students who expressed concerns over the cost of food, but who did not report difficulty in studying or high anxiety, constitute the Risk Level 4 group, which accounts for 10% of all students.

Overall, there are 24% of students at varying risk levels who need help to ensure food security.

Campus Support

In March 2015, President Janet Napolitano allocated \$75,000 per campus for implementing short-term relief where needed. UCSF Student Academic Affairs initiated the Food Security for Students (FSFS) pilot program to administer the funding and provide food support to students. During the first month of the program, 454 gift card packets were distributed.

As the FSFS program continues, the survey results also suggest other possible venues to help our students. Many students reported that they would like information about how to apply for the federal food assistance program (21%); the location of local food pantries, food banks, or other free food sources (23%); how to cook simple, cheap, and healthy meals (43%); how to manage and budget monthly living and college costs (41%); and where to turn on campus when having trouble getting enough food (21%). Services providing such information to students may

complement the FSFS program towards a more comprehensive solution to food security issues at UCSF.

Conclusion

The increasing living and educational costs erode food security for our students. This report hopes to shed light on this issue, help identify at-risk populations, and provide contextual information for planning and budgeting of financial support for our students.