

Office of the President

TO MEMBERS OF THE ACADEMIC AND STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE:

DISCUSSION ITEM

For Meeting of September 29, 2021

UPDATE ON STUDENT BASIC NEEDS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In November 2020, the UC Regents Special Committee on Basic Needs issued its report, *The University of California's Next Phase of Improving Student Basic Needs*.¹ The report included an aspirational goal for the University of California: to reduce the rate of food and housing insecurity among students by half by 2025. This item provides an update on the University's progress toward reducing basic needs insecurity, and it includes updates on State and federal advocacy efforts, financial aid supports, and campus efforts to support student basic needs.

BACKGROUND

The University has made great strides in supporting student basic needs. Over the years, basic needs advocacy efforts have grown as an increasing number of students reported experiencing food and housing insecurity. These comprehensive advocacy efforts led to the appropriation of \$15 million in one-time funding to establish Hunger Free Campuses from the Budget Act of 2018. As the needs of students grew, advocacy and support from the State was successful. As a result of these efforts, the Budget Act of 2019 included an appropriation of \$18.5 million in ongoing funding to address students' basic needs and rapid rehousing efforts.

In response to growing needs, the Special Committee on Basic Needs (Special Committee) was formed in 2019 and issued its 2020 report, *The University of California's Next Phase of Improving Student Basic Needs*. The report outlined goals and recommendations to reduce the rate of food and housing insecurity by half by 2025. In addition, the report included recommendations for policymakers and advocates, university leaders, student services practitioners, researchers, and students to assist the University with addressing students' basic needs.

STATUS OF LONG-TERM BASIC NEEDS GOALS

The report included four long-term goals specifying the amount by which food and housing insecurity among undergraduate and graduate students should be reduced. As efforts to track food and housing insecurity have evolved, so has the ability to refine survey measures to be

¹ 2020 UC Regents Special Committee on Basic Needs Report:
<https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/regmeet/nov20/slattach.pdf>

more inclusive of the variety of students' experiences of basic needs insecurity. According to the 2021 UC Accountability report, "a growing body of research has revealed that basic needs insecurity, the lack of the minimum necessary supports for well-being, jeopardizes students' success".² The University is tracking progress towards these goals, using the UC Undergraduate Experience Survey and the UC Graduate Student Experience Survey, with survey items such as the six-item food insecurity module developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This measure distinguishes between low and very low food security, providing UC with a more accurate and nuanced understanding of students' experience.

The University's collective efforts are moving swiftly to meet the aspirational goal and vision of reducing the rate of food and housing insecurity. The remainder of this update provides information on basic needs efforts during the period of July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021, including State and federal advocacy, financial aid support, and campus efforts.

STATE EFFORTS

With the support of State leadership, the University receives a total of \$38.8 million in ongoing State funding to support basic needs efforts across the system, including support for food, housing, and students' mental health. This ongoing funding is essential to ensuring that campuses can expand their services to meet student's needs.

Despite a dramatic drop in California revenues that was projected for the 2020–21 fiscal year, State leadership took steps to protect higher education students by funding their basic needs. Specifically, \$18.5 million in ongoing funding for student basic needs and rapid rehousing and \$5.3 million in ongoing funding for student mental health has provided campuses with the opportunity to provide critical services and support during the pandemic. In February 2021, \$650,000 in new, one-time funding was appropriated to support students' enrollment in CalFresh.³ Given the significant under-use and under-enrollment of UC students in CalFresh, this effort is key to ensuring that students have sustainable access to public food assistance programs.

In addition, Assembly Bill (AB) 1326 was introduced to complement this effort by requiring County human services agencies to designate at least one employee as a staff liaison to serve as a contact for academic counselors and other professional staff at a postsecondary education institution, in order to provide information on county programs and services. AB 1326 is a tremendous opportunity to ensure continuity of care and awareness of and equitable access to public assistance programs beyond CalFresh.

Looking to the future, Senate Bill 129 of the Budget Act of 2021 includes appropriations of \$15 million in new, ongoing student mental health funding to the University. This funding is critical to meeting students' basic needs as the University continues to advance health equity,

² 2021 UC Accountability Report, Chapter 2 — Undergraduate students: affordability.
<https://accountability.universityofcalifornia.edu/2021/chapters/chapter-2.html#i2.3.2>

³ The federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), known in California as CalFresh, provides eligible recipients up to \$194 per month on an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card to purchase healthy and nutritious food. This program is administered jointly by county welfare agencies and the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) in accordance with federal regulations.

which is an element of the expanded definition of basic needs. This funding will ensure that the University is able to build a robust infrastructure to support holistic mental health and well-being for UC students through evidence-based prevention, early intervention, and treatment and recovery services.

FEDERAL EFFORTS

The current landscape for federal advocacy for student's basic needs includes increased financial aid to recognize student basic needs as *universal* needs, as well as a pilot program to award funding to institutions of higher education to advance basic needs efforts. Federal advocacy efforts have been introduced for student basic needs on a national level. Specifically, Senate Bill 2004, the Basic Assistance for Students in College (BASIC) Act, and Double the Pell efforts will have a tremendous impact on students from historically low-income and middle class families, ensuring that UC is affordable and accessible to all students.

FINANCIAL AID EFFORTS

In alignment with the Special Committee's recommendations, the financial aid landscape for UC students is undergoing significant change at the federal, State, and University levels, and it is expected that these developments will alleviate basic needs insecurity among UC students. At the federal level, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) Simplification Act that passed in 2020 changes how students' income and assets are reviewed. A large number of low-income students will see greater differentiation in their assessed ability to pay, which could mean greater support for the neediest students. Thanks to the advocacy efforts of UC students through the Double the Pell campaign, the potential for significant increases in the Federal Pell Grant is on the horizon. The California Legislature has also provided for a number of new programs that will benefit UC students, such as the Learning-Aligned Employment Program, the Golden State Teacher Grant Program, the extension of summer financial aid, and emergency grant support for COVID relief. Dramatic changes to the Cal Grant and Middle Class Scholarship Program that would benefit UC students are still under consideration.

At the University level, the Board of Regents approved a Tuition Stability Plan that not only freezes tuition for each incoming group of students, but also sets aside a much greater proportion of the new revenue for financial aid than in the past; this plan includes increasing the proportion of fee revenue set aside for financial aid from 33 percent to 45 percent. This change will expand financial aid dollars provided to cover food, housing, and other non-tuition expenses. Furthermore, UC will be revising its estimates of these non-tuition costs using the results of its 2021 Cost of Attendance Survey, to ensure that students have access to a more accurate depiction of the total cost of attendance, thus helping to prevent basic needs insecurity.

Per Regents' recommendations to expand CalFresh outreach, the UC Financial Aid Offices helped students qualify for CalFresh in 2021 by notifying over 90,000 graduate and undergraduate students about their eligibility, based on their eligibility for Federal Work Study. This practice of issuing letters to notify students of their eligibility should in turn increase the number of students applying for CalFresh.

CAMPUS EFFORTS

Basic Needs Services

To adapt to the circumstances of the pandemic, campuses swiftly shifted to offering hybrid services, remaining open to serve students in creative ways. All campuses applied modifications to ensure public health safety within their services, such as contactless pick-up of grocery bags, de-densified workplaces, and scheduled food support appointments, among other adaptations to ensure continued food assistance during the pandemic. From July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021, campuses collectively served 52,883 unique students and made 226,790 contacts.

Figure 1: Total number of students using campus basic needs services during July 1, 2020–June 30, 2021

Campus	Unique students served*	Student contacts**
UC Berkeley	3,799	24,408
UC Davis	4,962	59,190
UC Irvine	2,789	19,878
UC Los Angeles	7,126	26,437
UC Merced	690	6,853
UC Riverside	9,798	16,205
UC San Diego	5,997	17,924
UC San Francisco	1,598	11,051
UC Santa Barbara	14,307	29,673
UC Santa Cruz	1,817	15,171
TOTAL	52,883	226,790

* The number of unique (unduplicated) students served is calculated by gathering the number of individual student identification card “swipes” registered at all basic needs services. The swipes amount to the total number of individual students served by State-funded basic needs programs.

** Student contacts represent the total number of student identification card “swipes,” or the total number of times students were served by State-funded basic needs programs.

Rapid Rehousing Services

Campus basic needs centers stepped up to provide housing support for students impacted by the pandemic. Collectively, campuses served at least 4,000 housing-insecure students across the UC system. Approximately 1,696 students obtained permanent housing, while many others received support (e.g., rent subsidies) to remain in their current housing.

Figure 2: Housing-insecure students served during July 1, 2020–June 30, 2021

Campus	Unique Housing-Insecure Students Served	Housing-Insecure Students Who Obtained Permanent Housing
Berkeley	817	61
Davis	494	298
Irvine	147	98
Los Angeles	746	4
Merced	136	132
Riverside	219	219
San Diego	484	37
San Francisco	78	62
Santa Barbara	287	284
Santa Cruz	592	501
TOTAL	4,000	1,696

Research and Evaluation

Basic needs research, evaluation, and data collection continue to be a priority for the University. A graduate student COVID-19 survey conducted in 2020 examined the potential impacts of COVID-19 on academics and basic needs (food and housing) among UC graduate students experiencing food and/or housing insecurity at seven UC campuses.⁴

Descriptive findings showed that, on average, the graduate students surveyed were significantly challenged during the pandemic. Almost half of students experienced an increase in their expenses (49 percent) and had to financially assist family members (47 percent). Almost one-third had difficulty covering living costs (30 percent), and about one-fifth applied for housing subsidies (23 percent) and had difficulty paying for food and housing (22 percent). During the early part of the pandemic (spring to summer), students reported trouble concentrating (61 percent), stress/anxiety (57 percent), issues sleeping (47 percent), and feelings of hopelessness (46 percent) nearly every day. Food insecurity was prevalent in 45 percent of surveyed students, and half accessed campus food assistance (e.g., food pantry, vouchers).

NEXT STEPS

The University continues to make progress toward its long-term goals regarding student basic needs and well-being. Campus basic needs leadership teams have been working diligently toward their own campus-based goals and will share these updates over the next several months in future Regents items.

⁴ Esaryk, E., Chodur, G.M., Kalaydjian, S., Martinez, S.M. (In prep). COVID-19 shutdown is related to graduate student basic needs insecurity: findings from 6 California public universities.