

MEETING STUDENTS' NEEDS:

Basic Needs at California's Public 4-Year Colleges

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Methodology

Findings

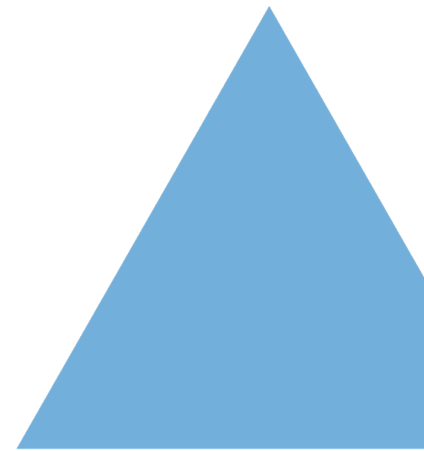
Conclusion

Recommendations

Appendix

- A. Racial makeup of all survey respondents
- B. Gender makeup of all survey respondents
- C. Employment status of all survey respondents
- D. Breakdown of CSU respondents' preference for one stop basic needs centers

Endnotes



1

2

3

5

11

13

14

16



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INTRODUCTION

California's public higher education system is home to eight out of ten college students in the state.¹ Last fall, the University of California (UC) reported 294,000 enrollees², while the California State University (CSU) reported an enrollment closer to 460,000 students³. These universities serve a large portion of California's college students. Both the UC and CSU continue to educate California's next generation of leaders, scholars, public servants, and more. As these universities continue to educate California students, it is critical to understand how these institutions build pathways for student success.

In order to build pathways to success, we must understand the extent of basic needs insecurity that students are facing. According to a National Library of Medicine study on the burden of basic needs on student success, students with food, financial, and housing insecurity were more likely to experience anxiety, depression, and a lower GPA than students not experiencing these insecurities.⁴ In 2023, nearly a third of all Californians are poor or near poverty.⁵ In the CSU, research on the supports and barriers that students encounter in attempting to meet their basic needs found that out of 13,315 students, 54.7% reported experiencing food and housing insecurity.⁶ Upon further examination, the study found that Black or African American students disproportionately faced food insecurity and homelessness (Crutchfield et. al, 2019). In addition, a 2017 UC study on basic needs found that 44% of the undergraduate student body in the spring of 2016 faced food insecurity. The UC study also found that students who identified as Black or African American (62%), Hispanic or Latino/a/e of any race (57%), and Indigenous (49%) students were disproportionately impacted by food insecurity compared to white students.⁷

Efforts to curb students' food and housing insecurity have made significant progress across the UC and CSU systems. In 2014, the UC Global Food Initiative opened food pantries at every UC campus. At the CSU, the first food pantries opened at the California State University Fresno and California Poly San Luis Obispo in 2014.⁸ A few years later, in 2016, the CSU established the Basic Needs Initiative to address students' unmet needs.⁹ As of May 2022, the UC system has a Basic Needs Center on every campus while the CSU has opened a Basic Needs Center on roughly 12 campuses (California State University, 2022). The CSU, however, does employ a Basic Needs Case Manager in 22 of 23 campuses.

In order to meaningfully address the basic needs of students, consistent funding to establish well-resourced centers is crucial. Prior to the 2019-20 and 2021 State Budget Acts, the UC and CSU did not receive ongoing funding from the State to address basic needs. In 2019-20, the UC received a total of \$18.5 million of ongoing funds to address basic needs and housing insecurity. Of that total, \$15 million is reserved for general basic needs and housing insecurity, while \$3.5 million is for "rapid re-housing efforts" (UCOP History of Basic needs, n.d., para. 3).¹⁰ At the CSU, the 2021 State Budget Act allotted \$30 million of ongoing funding to address mental health and basic needs system-wide, with an even split of \$15 million for each initiative.¹¹ Since the passing of the 2021-22 State Budget Act, all three California higher education institutions receive ongoing funding to support student basic needs.¹²



As funding has begun to be disbursed throughout both the UC and CSU systems, it is critical to understand the ways in which consistent efforts can shape student access and use of basic needs centers. This brief will examine results from a 2023 survey conducted by Young Invincibles which surveyed CSU and UC students on their awareness of basic needs efforts in their respective campus, access and barriers to receiving basic needs services, and the rate at which students utilized basic needs services. The findings from this brief will conclude with recommendations for the CSU and UC system as it continues to expand basic needs services. Additionally, this brief builds on Young Invincibles' research on basic needs centers at the California Community Colleges.

METHODOLOGY

To understand the efficacy of basic needs efforts at the UC and CSU system, we undertook this project with the guiding question, “Are California 4-year public college students aware of and accessing basic needs services?”. To answer this question, we developed a survey that asked questions regarding accessibility of services, awareness and understanding of basic needs services. We employed a two-pronged, in-person and digital approach to disseminating the surveys; the in-person approach consisted of two methods - first, members of Young Invincibles' Young Advocates Program distributed printed flyers in various CSU and UC campuses; the second method consisted of Young Invincibles' staff and young advocates tabling at various CSU and UC campuses. In the in-person method, the flyers contained a link to the survey and a brief description of the purpose of the survey. The second approach was a digital push through affinity centers, student organizations and student leaders at both the CSU and UC. We conducted outreach via email and social media asking centers and leaders to either send the survey to the students they served or to post on their social media accounts. The sample size of the survey was 318.

The survey consisted of the following themes:

- I. **Context:** this section included questions that contextualized the magnitude of the basic needs issues that students face overall.
- II. **Awareness:** this section of the survey asked students to identify whether their campus had a basic needs center, their understanding of basic needs, and to identify the types of services their basic needs center offered.
- III. **Access and Barriers to Access:** this section of the survey asked questions on whether students knew how to access basic needs services, if a one-stop-shop center would be more beneficial than a variety of centers, whether they would be able to access services during normal business hours (Monday- Friday, 9AM - 5PM), if they would be comfortable seeking basic needs services, and whether they prefer student staff or non-student staff.

The survey was fielded over two short periods of time: once during the summer months, between July 17th and August 14th when the majority of students are not on-campus and campus operations are reduced. The second at the beginning of the school year between



September 6th and October 31st when students receive welcome back announcements and while campus services generally conduct outreach efforts. The official start of the survey collection efforts was July and the collection efforts concluded on October 31st.

The total number of surveys collected is 372, however after reviewing data, the total number of surveys completed is 318. The 54 surveys excluded from data analysis did not include information on whether the respondent attended a CSU or UC. Because the purpose of the survey was to examine the impacts that basic needs efforts have on students at both segments, the responses could not be included.

The Summer wave total is n=151. The Fall wave total is n=167. Of these, the total number of CSU respondents is n=233 and the total number of UC respondents is n=85. Table 1 highlights survey responses divided into the respective wave of collection and the institution that the respondent attended.

Table 1: Survey Breakdown by Wave

WAVE	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
SUMMER WAVE - CSU RESPONSES	117
SUMMER WAVE - UC RESPONSES	34
FALL WAVE - CSU RESPONSES	116
FALL WAVE - UC RESPONSES	51
SURVEY TOTAL N=318	



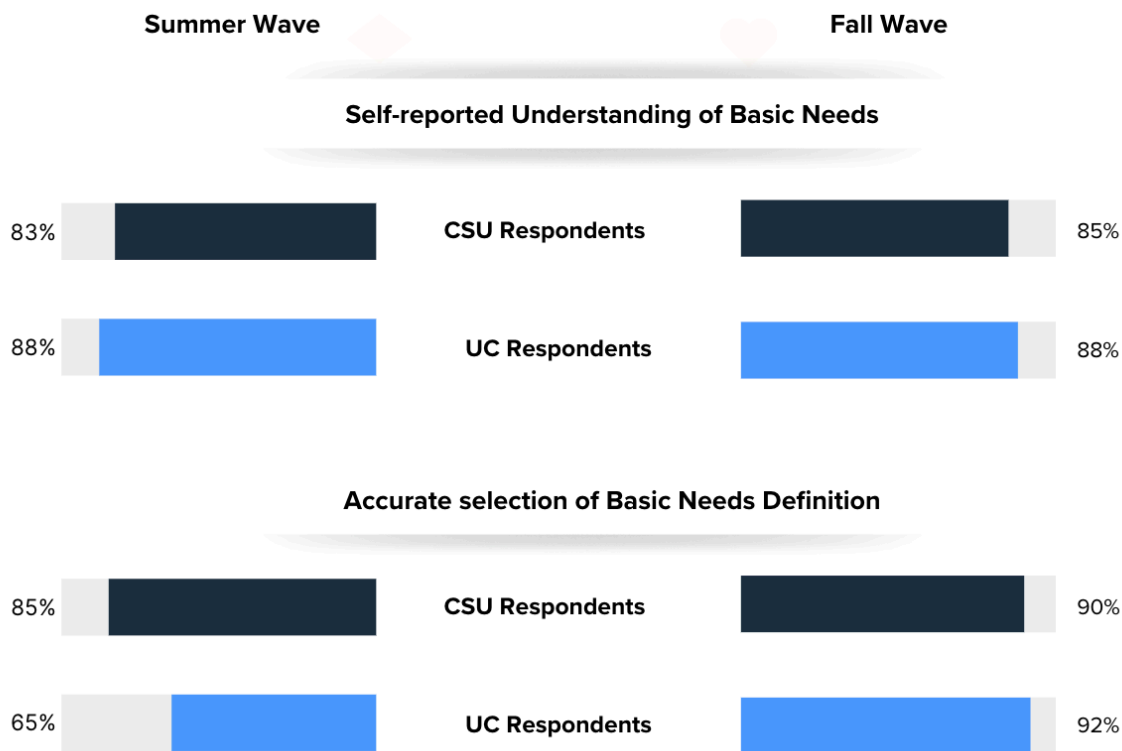
FINDINGS

Findings will examine responses to the areas of interest with a breakdown into two groups: CSU and UC. Additionally, the findings will examine results from each wave of collection - the Summer wave and Fall wave.

Student Awareness of Basic Needs

Understanding of Basic Needs Services

Figure 1: Self-Reported Understanding vs. Accurate Selection of Basic Needs Definition



In order to gauge students' understanding of what basic needs services are, the survey asked respondents whether they had an idea of what basic needs refers to. In the Summer wave, 83% of CSU respondents (n=117) stated that they had some idea of what basic needs means, compared to 88% of UC respondents (n=34). In the Fall wave, 85% of CSU respondents (n=116) indicated that they had some idea of what basic needs refers to, compared to 88% of UC respondents (n=51).

To further examine respondents' understanding of the definition of basic needs services, the survey asked respondents to choose from a list of options, the definition that best describes



basic needs. In the Summer wave, 85% of CSU respondents selected the correct definition of basic needs, compared to 65% of UC respondents. In the Fall wave, 90% of CSU respondents selected the correct definition of basic needs, compared to 92 % of UC respondents.

The differences between the Summer and Fall waves of collection highlight some differences between CSU and UC students. In both waves, higher levels of UC respondents indicated that they had some idea of what basic needs refers to. However, upon examining respondents' selection of which definition best describes basic needs, we find in the Summer wave, CSU students more accurately reported the accurate definition. In the Fall wave, we find a small difference between CSU and UC respondents' selection of the correct basic needs definition.

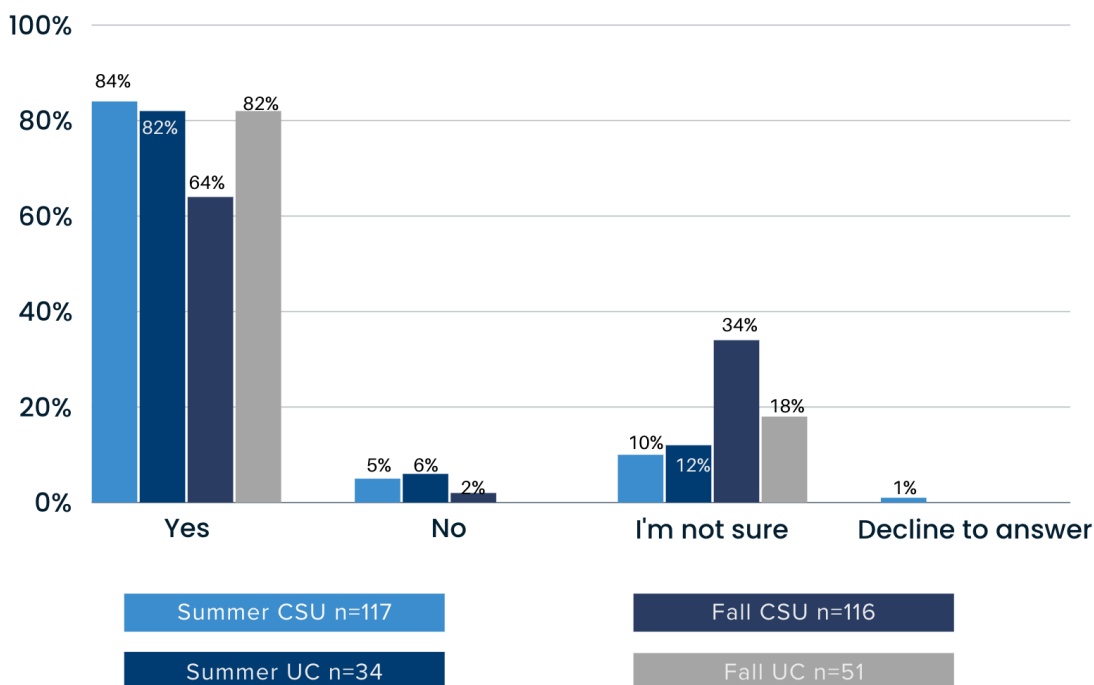
Knowledge of Basic Needs Services on Campus

To examine whether students were aware of basic needs services on campus, the survey asked respondents whether they were aware of their campus having a basic needs center, and the types of basic needs services that they believed their campus provides.

In examining respondents' knowledge of a basic needs center on their campus, we find that in the Summer wave, 84% of CSU respondents indicated that their campus had a basic needs center, while 10% indicated that they were not sure. In comparison, 82% of UC respondents stated that their campus has a basic needs center, while 12% stated that they were not sure. In the Fall wave, 64% of CSU respondents indicated that their campus has a basic needs center, while 34% indicated that they were not sure. In comparison, 82% of UC respondents stated that their campus has a basic needs center, while 18% stated that they were not sure of whether their campus has a basic needs center.

Figure 2: Percentage of Respondents Aware of Basic Needs Center on Campus

Percentage of Respondents Aware of Basic Needs Center on Campus





The differences between CSU and UC students in their knowledge of whether their campus has a basic needs center highlights the difference between the two segments - in the Summer wave, there was a 2% difference between CSU and UC students' knowledge of whether their campus has a basic needs center. However, in the Fall wave, we find a 12% difference between CSU and UC students' knowledge of a basic needs center on their campus with a greater percentage of UC students affirming the existence of a basic needs center.

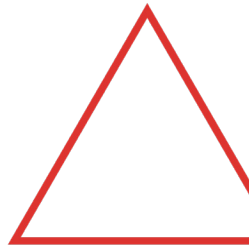
Awareness of Basic Needs Services Offered on Campus

Respondents were asked to identify whether their campus offered at least two of eight options of basic needs services, listed in Figure 3. In the Summer wave, 91% of CSU respondents affirmed that their campus provides at least two of the listed basic needs services, while 3% indicated that they were not sure. In comparison, 91% of UC respondents stated that their campus provides at least two of the listed services, while 9% stated that they were not sure. In the Fall wave, 91% of CSU students stated that their campus provides at least two of the listed services, while 8% stated that they were not sure. In comparison, 88% of UC respondents indicated that their campus provides at least two of the listed services, while 12% indicated that they were not sure whether their campus provides at least two of the listed services.

Figure 3: Breakdown of Basic Needs Services

BASIC NEEDS SERVICES

- 1 FOOD
- 2 HOUSING
- 3 RENTAL ASSISTANCE
- 4 MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES
- 5 CHILDCARE
- 6 FREE CLOTHING
- 7 HYGIENE PRODUCTS
- 8 LAPTOP RENTAL



In the findings on whether respondents were aware of whether their campus offered at least two of eight listed basic needs services, we find minimal differences between CSU and UC students' knowledge on this issue.

Access and Barriers

To assess the accessibility of basic needs services and potential stigma that impacts students' willingness to seek services, the survey asked a series of questions that aimed to explore each area. To ensure that respondents were clear on the types of services that the survey question addressed, the question included a list of typical services offered.

Results from the survey question asking respondents whether they know where to access basic needs services finds that in the Summer wave of collection, 96% of CSU respondents stated that they know where to access all or some of the services listed. In comparison, 94% of UC respondents indicated that they know where to access all or some of the services listed. In the Fall wave, 95% of CSU respondents indicated that they know where to access all or some of the services listed, compared to 94% of UC respondents that also stated that they know where to access all or some of the services.

To further address accessibility of services, the survey asked respondents whether they would be able to access services during regular business hours. This question was posed to understand whether students are able to access services during the business hours that the majority of UC and CSU basic needs centers are open.

Results from this question showed that in the Summer wave, 83% of CSU respondents stated that they would be able to access a basic needs center during regular business hours, while 6% stated that they would not be able to access the center during regular business hours. In comparison, 68% of UC respondents stated that they can access the center during business hours, while 6% stated that they would not be able to access it. In the Fall wave, 80% of CSU respondents stated that they can access services during regular operating hours, while 4% stated that they would not be able to access the center. In comparison, 75% of UC respondents indicated that they can access the center during regular business hours, while 4% indicated that they would not be able to.





Table 2: Breakdown of Respondents Ability to Access Basic Needs Services During Regular Business Hours

	CAN ACCESS	CANNOT ACCESS
Summer Wave		
CSU RESPONDENTS	83%	6%
UC RESPONDENTS	68%	6%
Fall Wave		
CSU RESPONDENTS	80%	4%
UC RESPONDENTS	75%	4%

Note: respondents that declined to answer this question are not represented in the above findings.

To understand students’ comfortability with using basic needs services, the survey directly asked respondents whether they are comfortable asking for support services. Additionally, the survey asked respondents whether they would feel more comfortable interacting with student vs non-student staff at the basic needs center.

In response to whether they are comfortable asking for services, in the Summer wave, 71% of CSU respondents stated that they are comfortable asking for support, while 10% stated they are not comfortable asking for support. In comparison, 73% of UC respondents stated that they are comfortable asking for support, while 15% are not comfortable asking for support. In the Fall wave, 66% of CSU respondents indicated that they are comfortable asking for support, while 16% stated that they are not comfortable asking for support. In comparison, 61% of UC respondents stated that they are comfortable asking for support, while 16% of UC respondents are not comfortable asking for support.

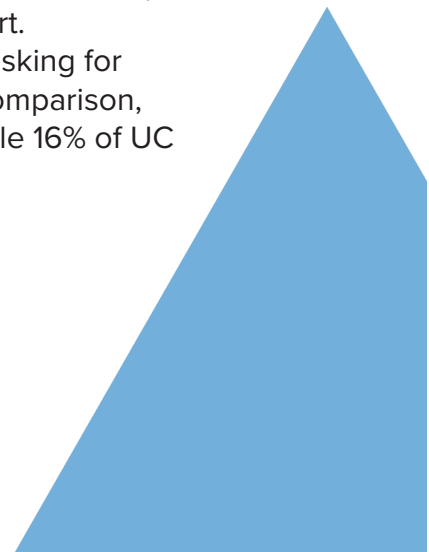


Figure 4: Breakdown of Respondents' Comfort Level with Seeking Basic Needs Support

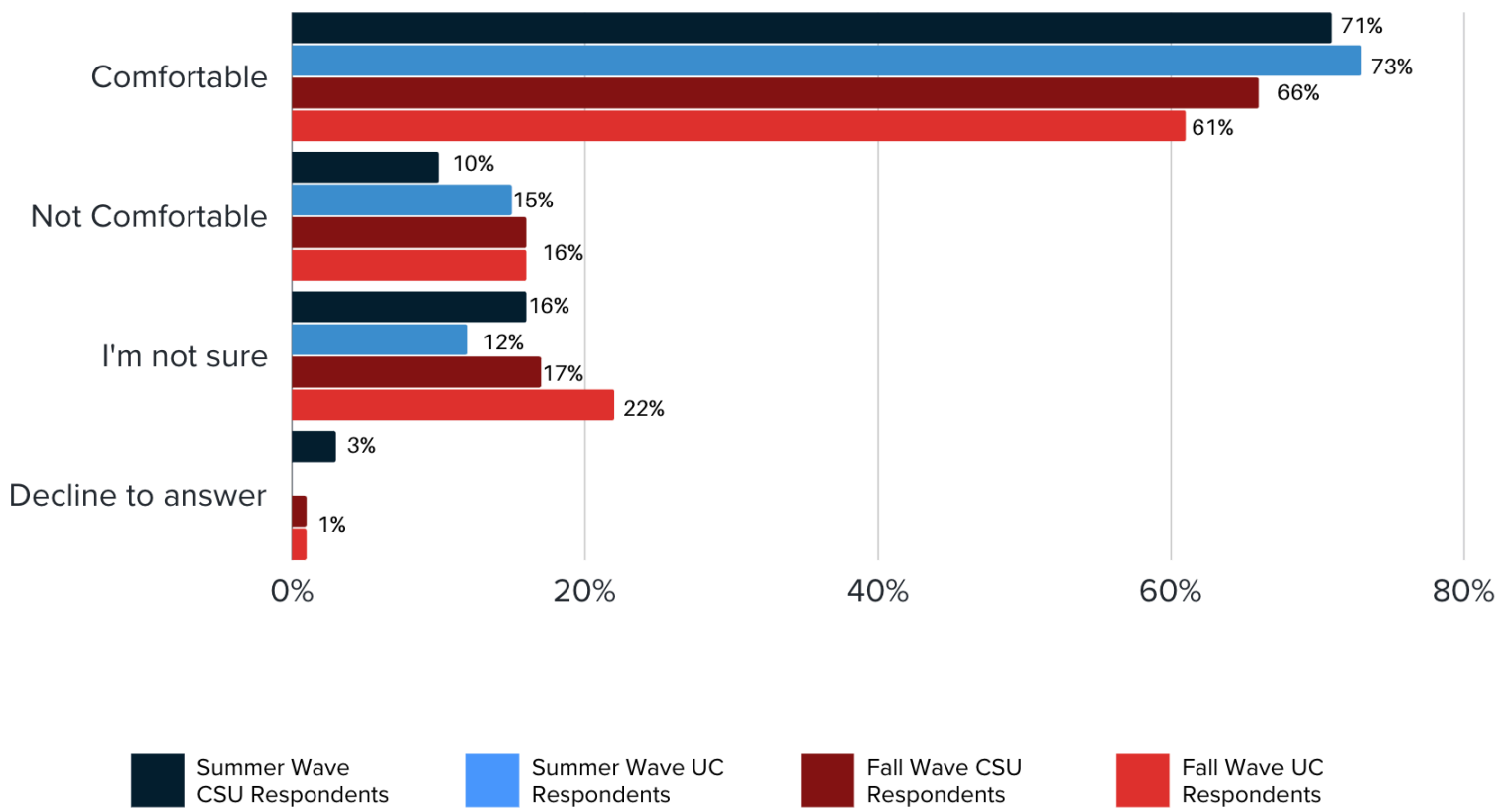


Figure 5 illustrates students' comfortability in seeking services from student staff versus non-student staff, in the Summer wave, 55% of CSU respondents stated that they would be more comfortable seeking services from a student staff member, while 14% stated that they would not be more comfortable seeking support from student vs non-student staff. In comparison, 59% of UC respondents indicated that they would be more comfortable with student support staff, while 21% stated that they would not be more comfortable with student staff. In the Fall wave, 39% of CSU respondents stated that they would be more comfortable seeking services from student basic needs staff, while 18% stated that they would not be more comfortable. In comparison, 53% of UC respondents indicated that they would be more comfortable with student staff, while 20% indicated that they would not be more comfortable.

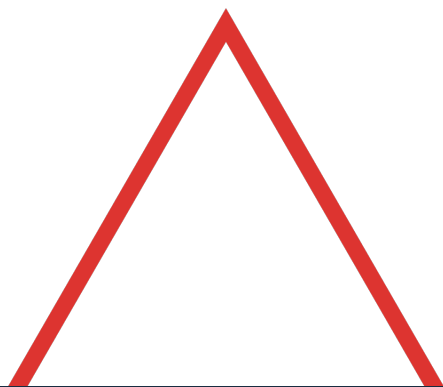
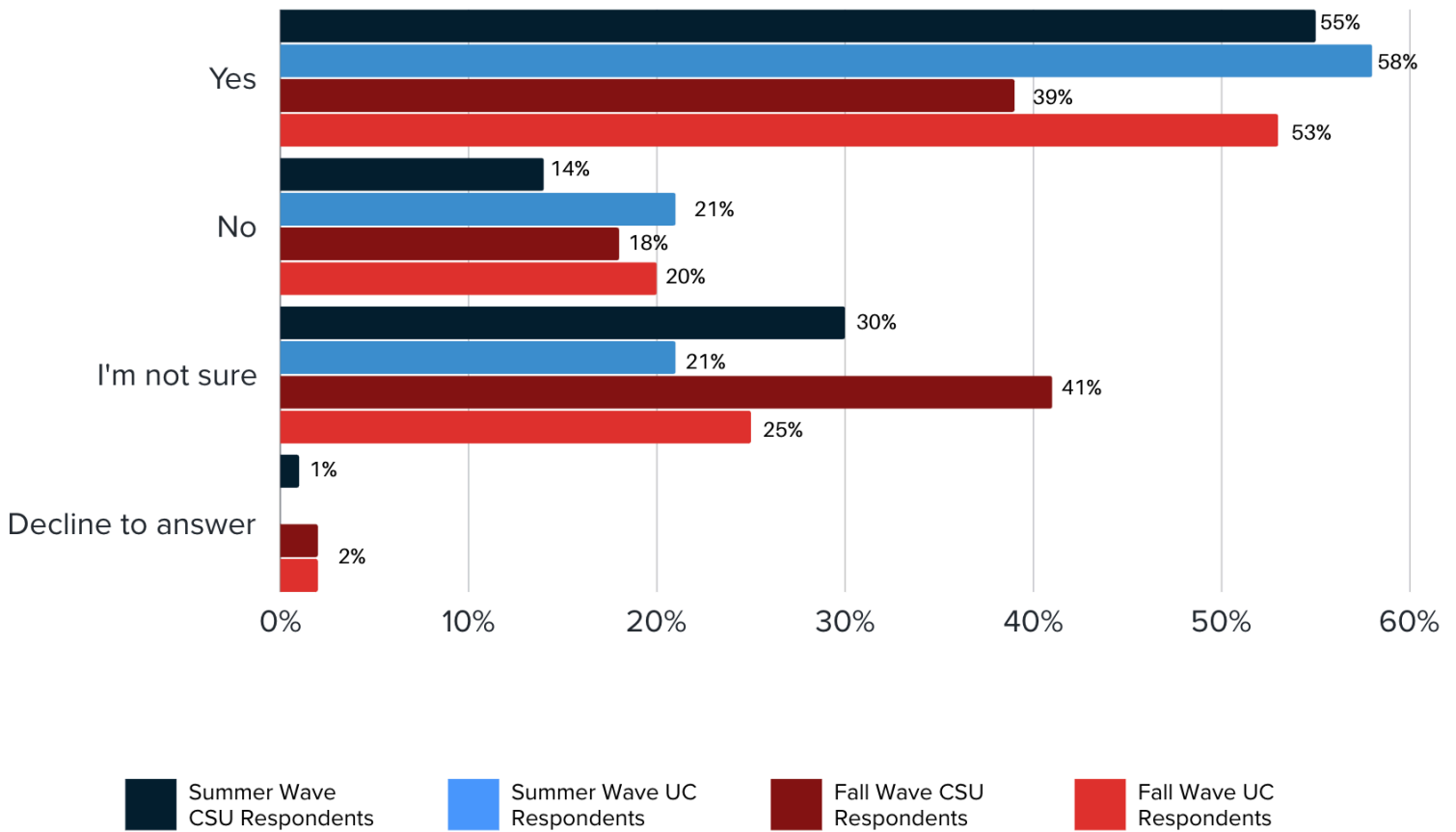


Figure 5: Breakdown of Respondents Comfort Level with Seeking Support from Student vs. Non-Student Staff

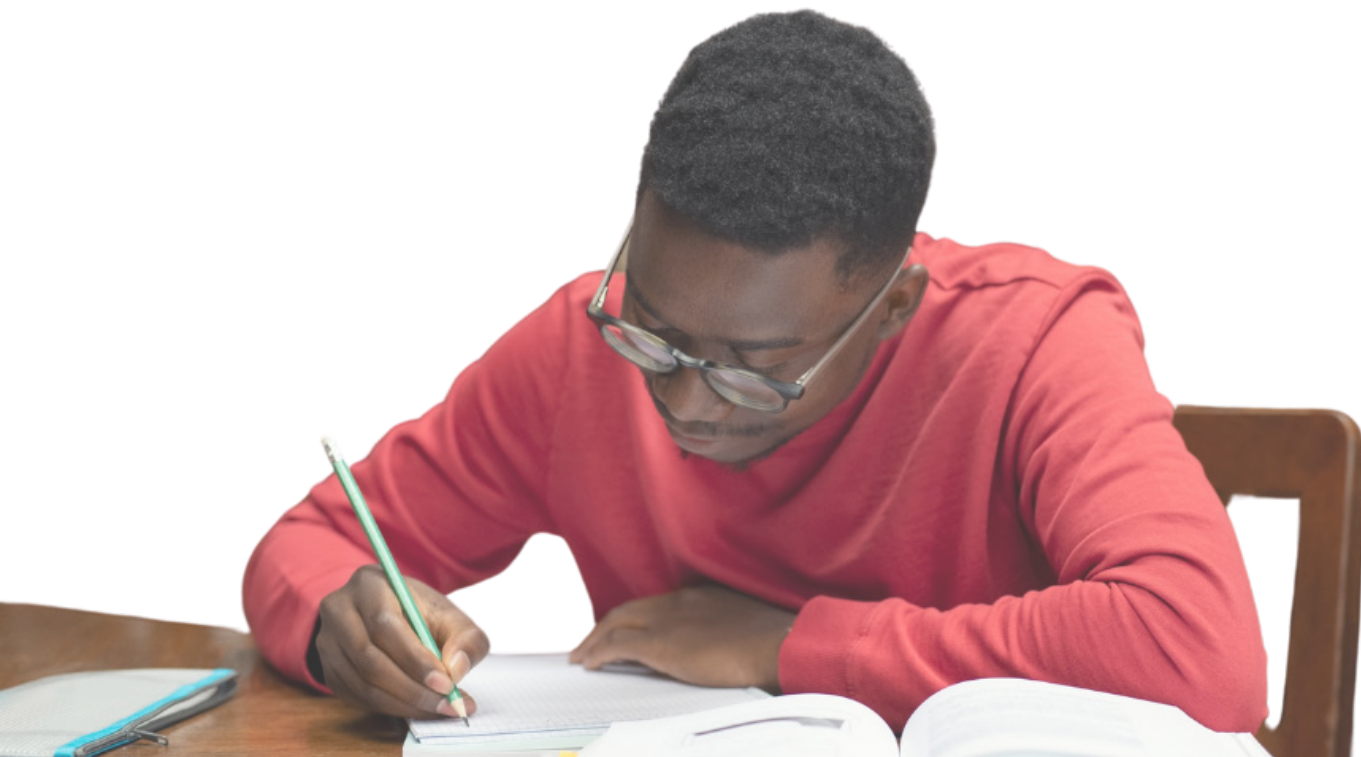


CONCLUSION

To understand students’ attitudes and behaviors toward basic needs, we attempted to answer “Are California 4-year public college students aware of and accessing basic needs services?”. The key findings highlight little differences and great similarity between CSU and UC students’ awareness of and access to basic needs services. The findings offer insight into the gaps in institutional efforts to increase awareness of services and the actual takeup of services. While awareness of services is one piece of the basic needs puzzle, transforming that knowledge into usage is a piece that must be addressed with urgency. Further analysis to understand why students are aware of, but not using services at a rate comparable to their reported need is critical to the success of future basic needs efforts. Below, we list additional key takeaways:

1. There is little difference between the Summer and Fall period when it comes to students' awareness of a basic needs center on campus. In contrast, CSU students were more likely to know whether their campus has a basic needs center in the Summer than in the Fall.
2. Majority of CSU and UC respondents are aware of the types of services offered on their campus.
3. Majority of CSU and UC respondents are aware of where to access basic needs services on their campus.
4. When it comes to accessibility during regular business hours (M-F, 9AM-5PM), we find that CSU respondents are more likely to be able to access services than UC respondents.
5. In terms of comfort seeking services, we find a considerable drop-off from other results that address accessibility. Here, we find that both UC and CSU respondents are more likely to feel comfortable accessing services in the Summer than in the Fall. This could perhaps be to a larger student population on campus during the Fall semester than the Summer.
6. While over half of both CSU and UC students state they would be more comfortable seeking services from a student basic needs staffer we do not find an overwhelming majority as seen in other areas of analysis.

As the CSU and UC system continue to expand their basic needs efforts with continuous state funding, we find that students are showing high levels of awareness of services. Here, we find a similar gap between respondents' knowledge of services and where to access them versus utilization of services and the segments' findings regarding awareness and utilization.. According to the UC, almost half of students across the UC are contacted with information on basic needs, however, the number of students served is roughly 10 percent.¹³ At the CSU, findings illustrate an overall lower rate of utilization across basic needs services - this could be because the CSU has not yet adopted one-stop shop centers across the entire system. This aligns with our findings of whether CSU students would be more likely to use a one-stop shop. We find that 76% of all CSU respondents state they would prefer a one-stop center for services.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Results from Young Invincibles' survey captured two short time-periods that aimed to understand how students overall awareness of services, accessibility of said services, and whether stigma impacts student take-up of services. The purpose of the survey was to explore the impact of continuous funding on students. We find preliminary results that show that the continuous state funding already has a positive impact on students when compared to results published by the CSU and UC in previous years. We have laid out the following recommendations to support the CSU and UC in their efforts to continue to address the high levels of basic needs insecurity across the state.

- 1. Align California's higher education systems.** Currently, the California Community Colleges and the University of California have basic needs centers on every campus across their systems. The California State University currently has basic needs centers at 12 of 23 campuses. Aligning California's higher education will allow for familiarity with support across each segment. According to the California Community Colleges, 59 percent of CSU graduates and 29 percent of UC graduates are community college transfers.¹⁴ For community college transfer students to the CSU, continuity in services from community colleges' one-stop shop model would support an increase in take-up of services for the CSU.
 - To support efforts toward alignment, one-time state funding to the CSU to establish centers at every campus is crucial to the success of basic needs efforts at the CSU.
 - Information sharing between the three institutions would allow leaders to learn from the successes and drawbacks that result from certain efforts.
- 2. Ensure basic needs services are centrally located.** It is imperative that the UC and CSU locate basic needs services in easily accessible areas on campus. Centers located in central areas will decrease the barriers that students may face in accessing centers.
- 3. Establish student-centered basic needs committees.** Students are in contact with their peers and have a better understanding of the types of services that they need. Campuses should establish a Student Basic Needs Committee that can serve as the lifeline between efforts and students.
- 4. Conduct regular surveys and touchpoints with students.** To better understand the gap between awareness of services and the actual take-up of services, campuses should conduct consistent surveys that are easily accessible to students and that can inform campuses of the services that can be further developed. We find that a successful example of a campus that can serve as a model for CSU and UC campuses is Compton College.¹⁵
- 5. Increase in ongoing funding to address basic needs.** As the cost of basic needs increases, state funding should increase adjusting for inflation to ensure that the spending power of each dollar is maintained. As schools continue to conduct outreach, the rate of students utilizing basic needs will continue to increase. It is important that the available resources per student does not decrease over time.

Figure A: Racial Makeup of all Survey Respondents

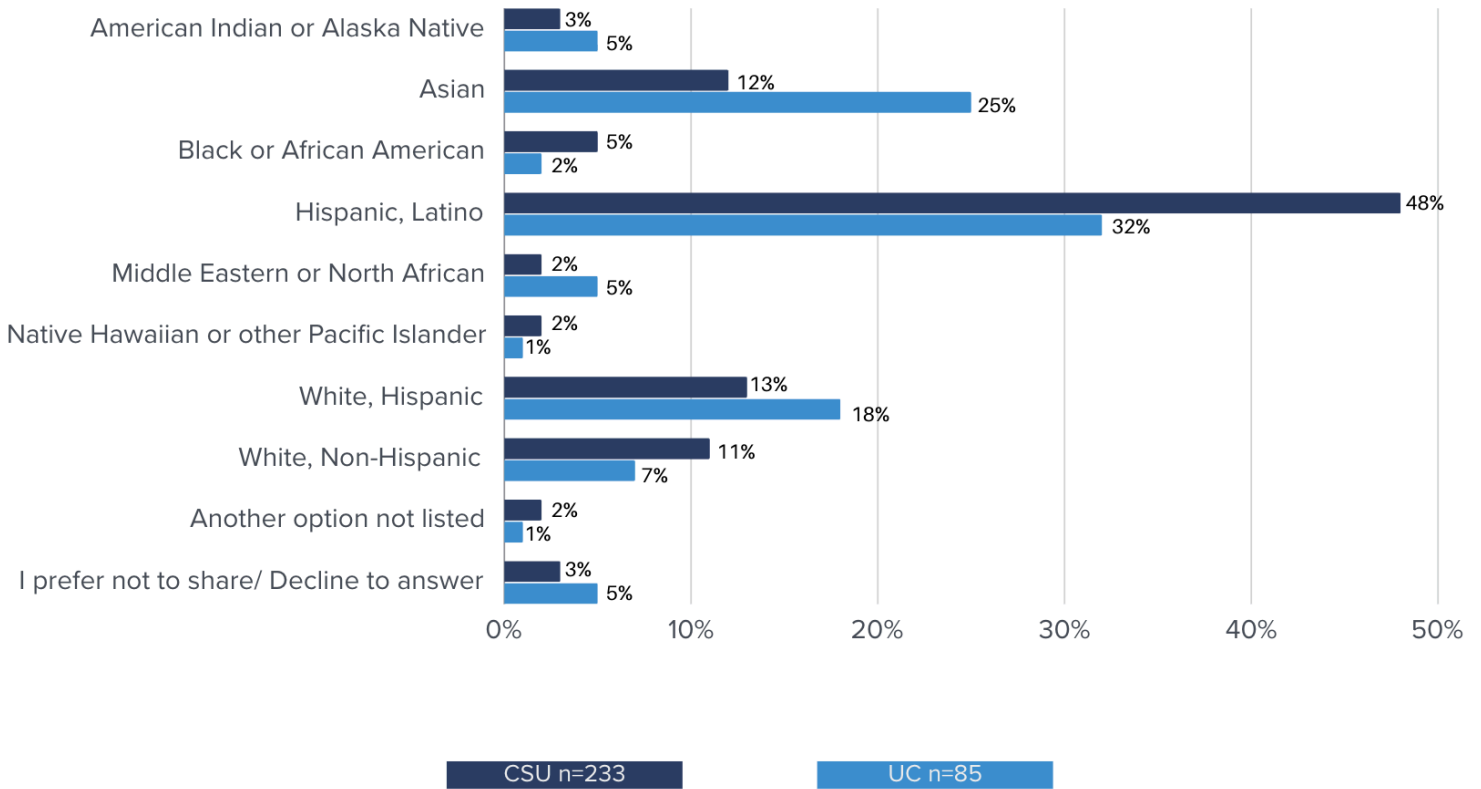


Figure B: Gender Makeup of all Survey Respondents

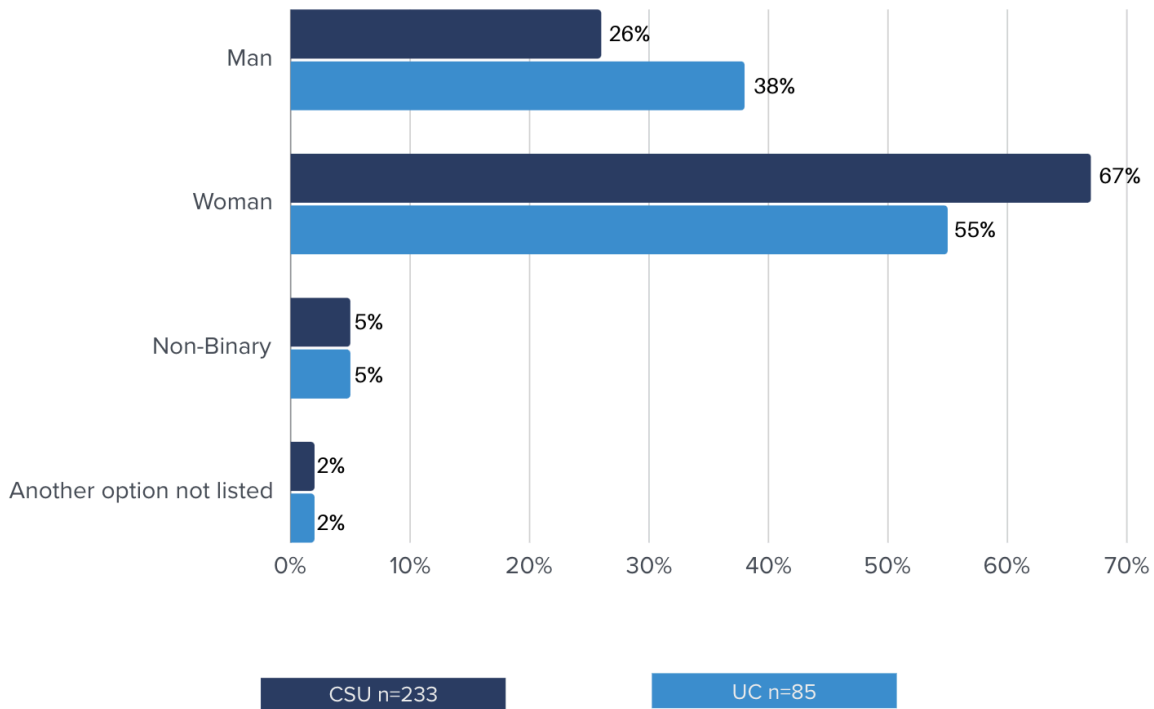


Figure C: Employment Status of all Survey Respondents

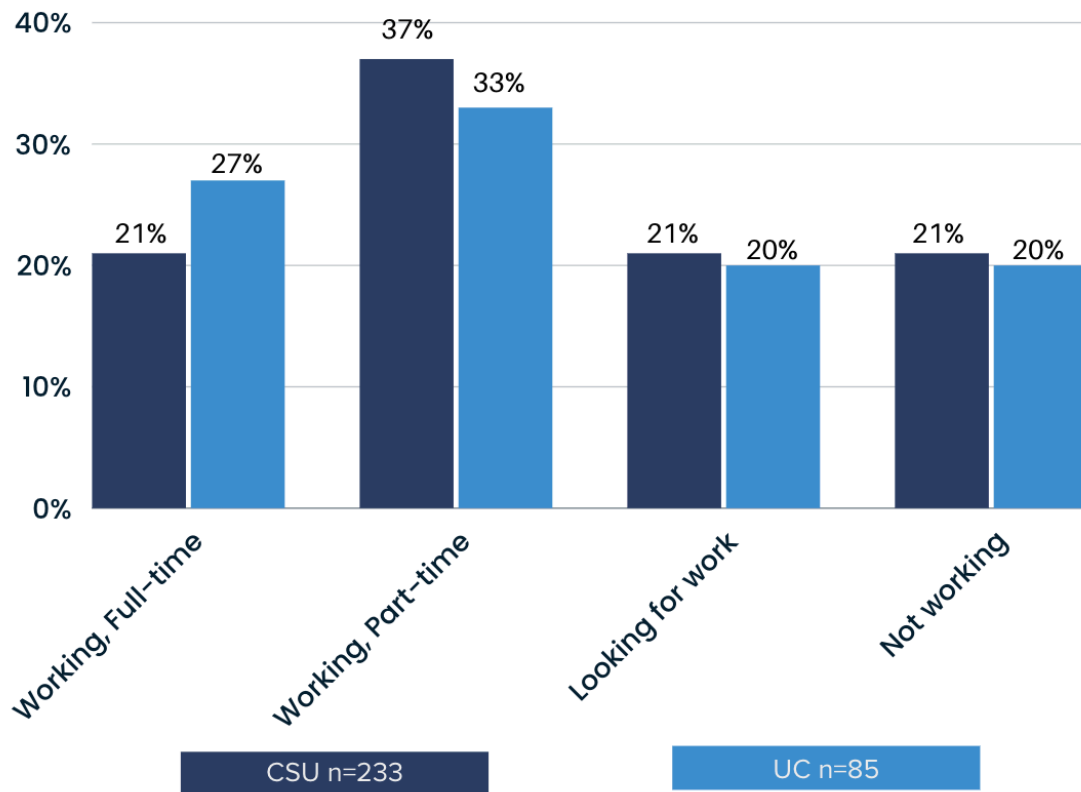
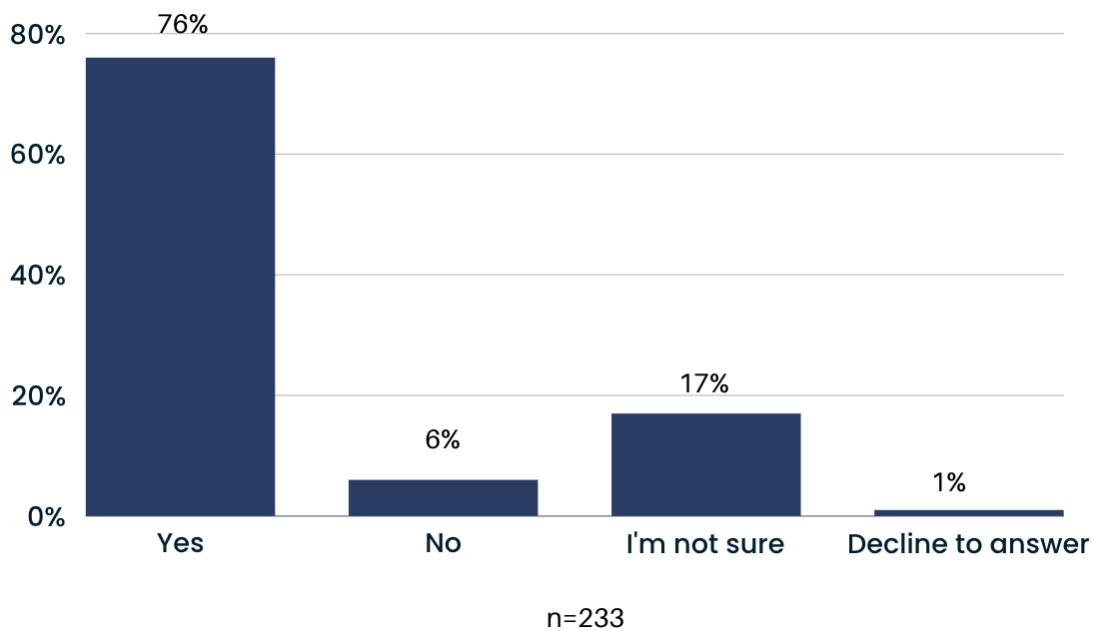


Figure D: Breakdown of CSU Respondents' Preference for One-stop Basic Needs Centers



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