

Issues Affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic and Their Impacts on Food Insecurity Among UCSD Students

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Introduction

- **Food insecurity** is defined as the state of being without adequate access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food which can be caused by a number of factors such as income, accessibility, location, resources, and transportation (Weaver et al. 2020)
- **Lack of access and resources to food has been linked to students having less concentration and energy levels, proving to have both mental and physical effects** (Weaver et al. 2020)
- Issues exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic such as housing status, employment status, and rising costs of food staples were surveyed to see if they had an effect on food insecurity

Objective

- **To determine if financial, transportation, and housing issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on UCSD students' food insecurity status**

Methods

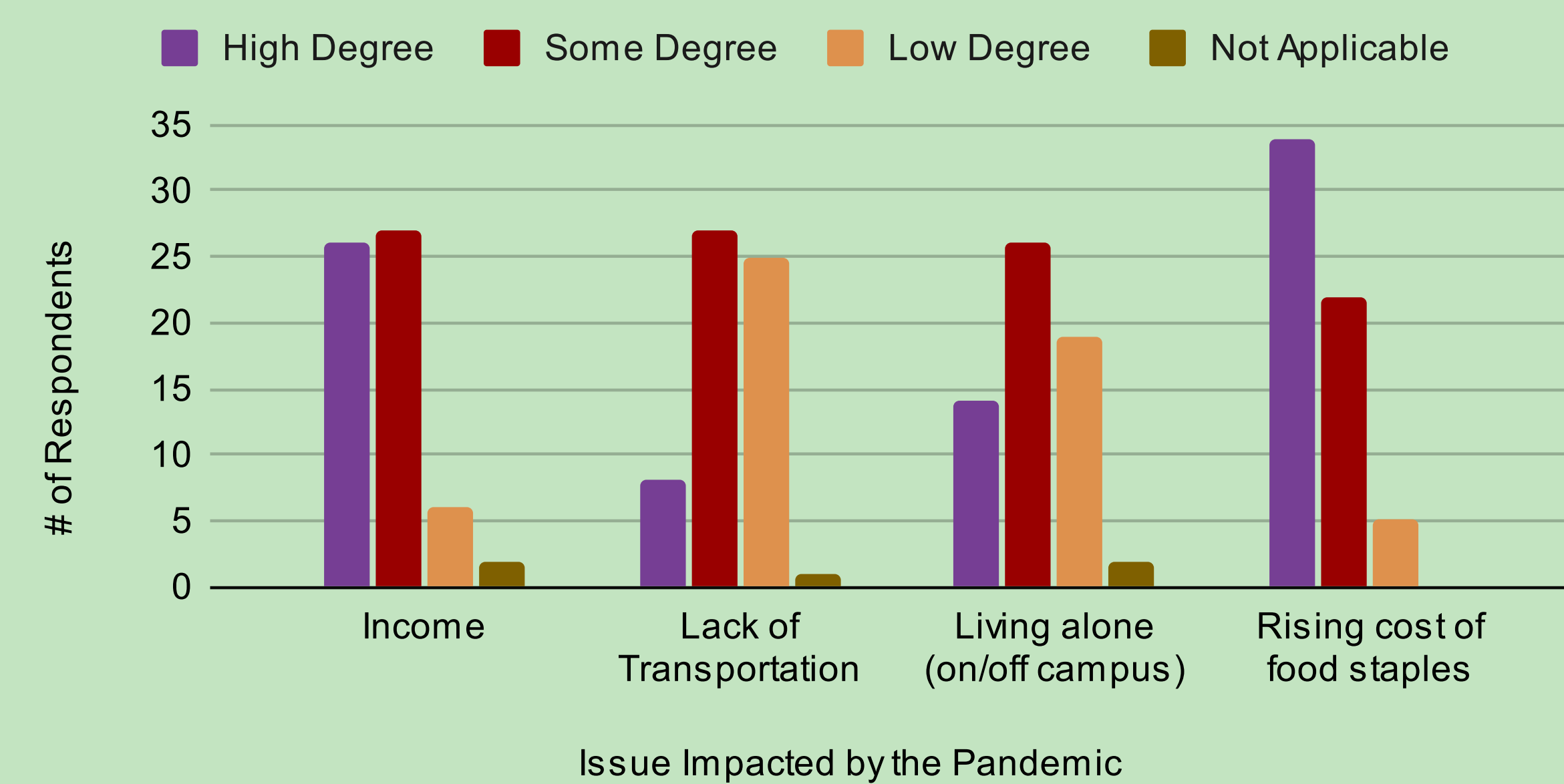
- A **cross-sectional survey** was anonymously conducted through Google Forms with 18 questions among current students attending UC San Diego
- Data collection between April 24th and May 10th, 2022
- Recruitment conducted via Triton Food Pantry and Reddit
- Questions were asked about the relations between **exposure** variables: income, transportation, housing status, and the rising costs and if they affect students' **outcomes** on choosing cheaper options, eating less, and skipping meals
- Data analyzed in SPSS

Results

- UCSD students (N=61, 55 undergraduate, 6 graduate) perceived that the rising cost of food staples and income during the COVID-19 pandemic had a **significant impact on students' food insecurity status** when it came to eating less, skipping meals, and choosing cheaper options, compared to the impacts caused by living situation and transportation accessibility
- Among 12 logistic regression models, we found 2 to be statistically significant ($p < .001$) with a positive relationship between **(1) rising cost of food staples and choosing cheaper options**, and **(2) between income and eating less**
 - The remaining logistic regression models were not statistically significant

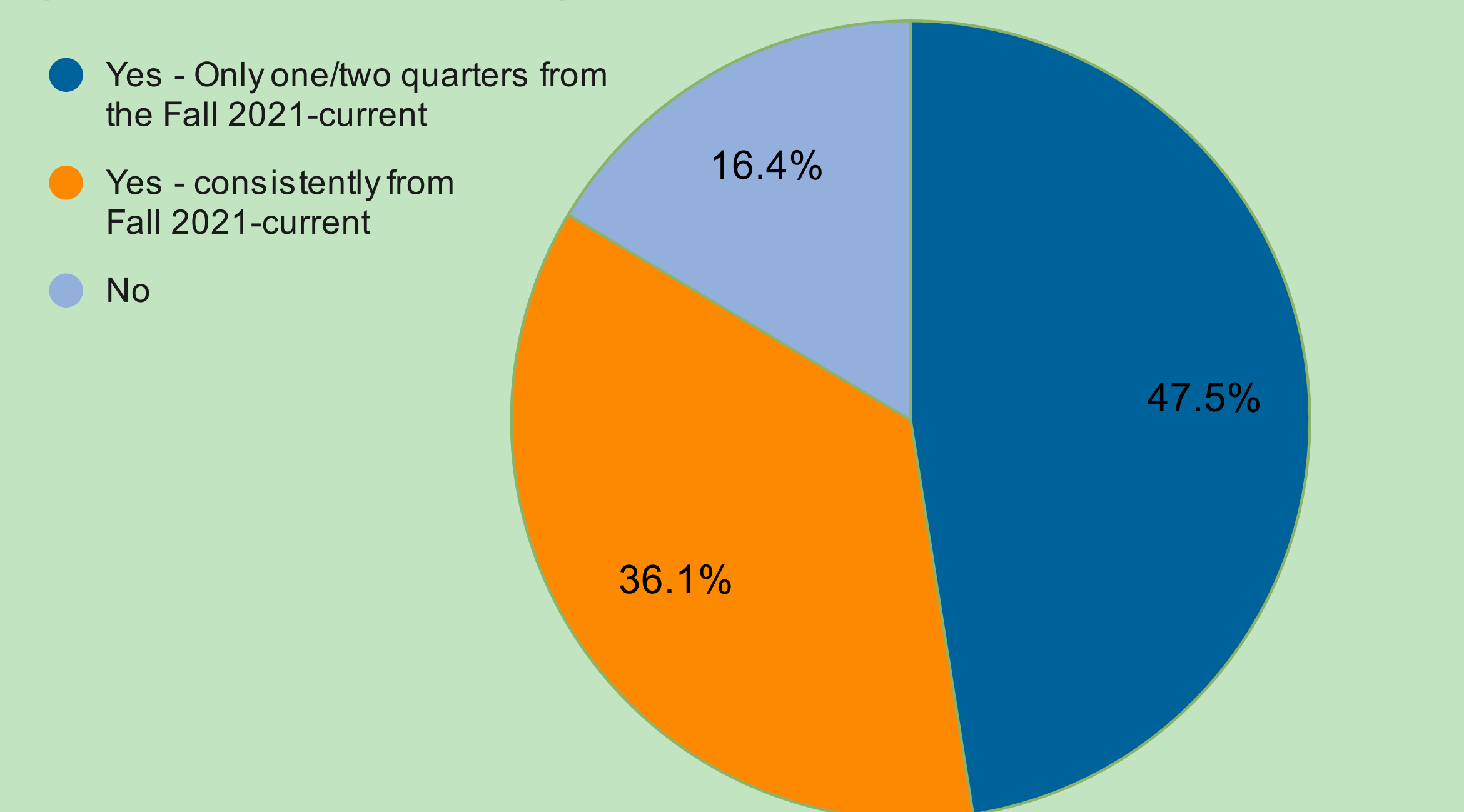
Table 1. Demographics	
Year	
First Year undergraduate	14.80%
Second Year undergraduate	14.80%
Third Year undergraduate (or 1st year Transfer student)	14.80%
Fourth Year undergraduate (or 2nd year Transfer student)	37.70%
Fifth Year undergraduate (or 3rd year Transfer student)	8.20%
Graduate student (e.g. Masters, Doctoral, Post-Doctoral)	9.80%
Gender	
Female	65.50%
Male	31.10%
Non-binary	3.30%
Ethnicity	
Hispanic	26.20%
Racial Background	
Asian	50.80%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	3.30%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	3.30%
Black or African American	1.60%
White	41%
Prefer not to answer	3.30%
Biracial	3.30%
Housing	
On-campus with a shared kitchen	27.00%
On-campus alone (with your own kitchen)	3.30%
Off-campus with family	23%
Off-campus with housemates (non-family)	36.10%
Off-campus alone	4.90%
On campus no kitchen	3.30%
Transportation	
Public transportation	32.80%
car	73.80%
walk	47.50%
bike, scooter, skateboard	9.80%
ridesharing (lyft, uber)	3.30%
grocery delivery	1.60%
Major Sources of Income	
Jobs	57.40%
Grants	41%
Loans	14.80%
Family Assistance	55.70%
Meals Cooked in a week	
<7	65%

Figure 1. Agreement about COVID-Related Issues Related to Students Eating Less (Fall 2021 – Current)



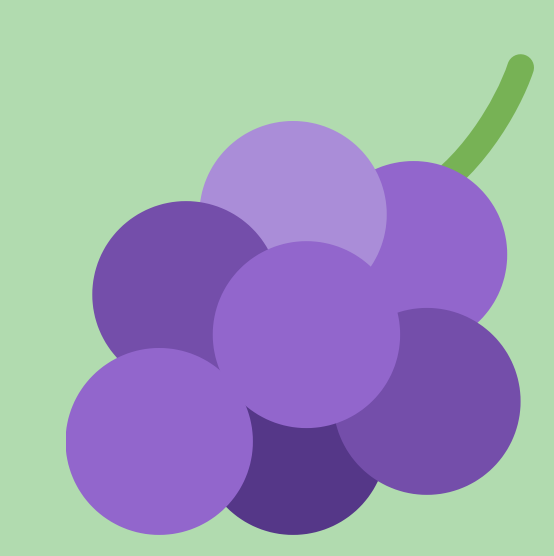
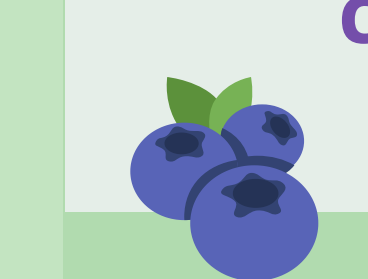
- Students agree that there is either a **high or some degree** of relationship to income levels, including rising cost of food staples to eating less
- Similar findings were associated with skipping meals and choosing cheaper options

Figure 2. Students Who Had a Dependable Income (Fall 2021 – Current)

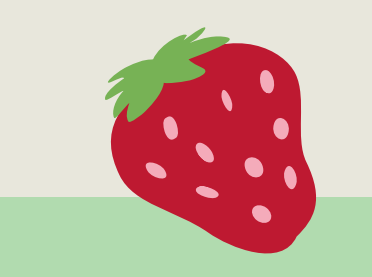
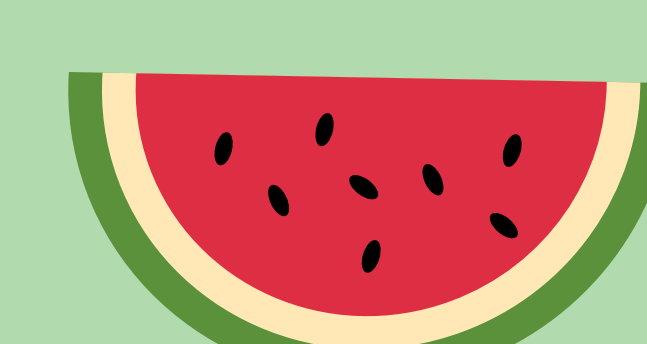


- Approximately 16.4% of our sample is at **evident risk** for food insecurity as income is a major factor

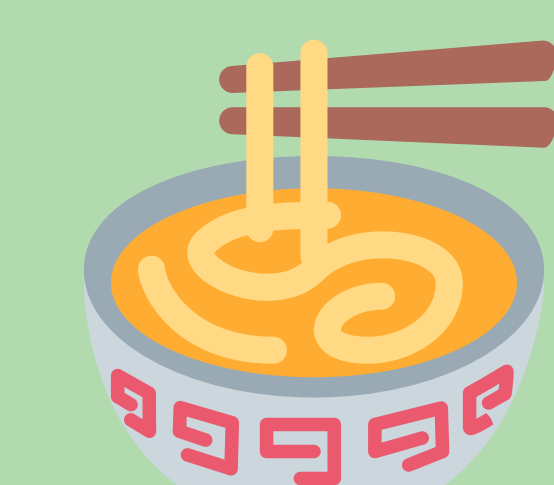
100% of respondents perceived that students were choosing cheaper options due to rising cost of food staples



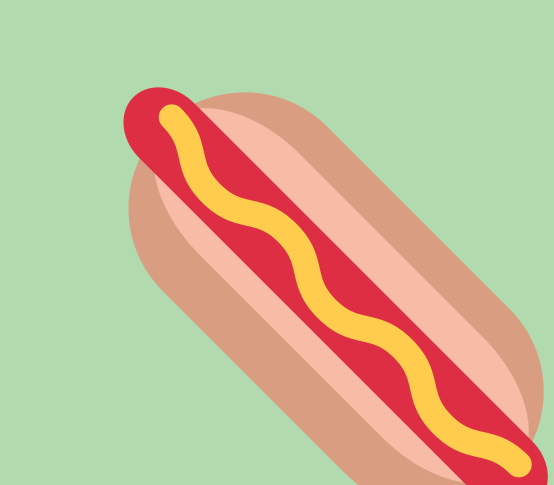
87% of students perceived that other students were skipping meals due to income



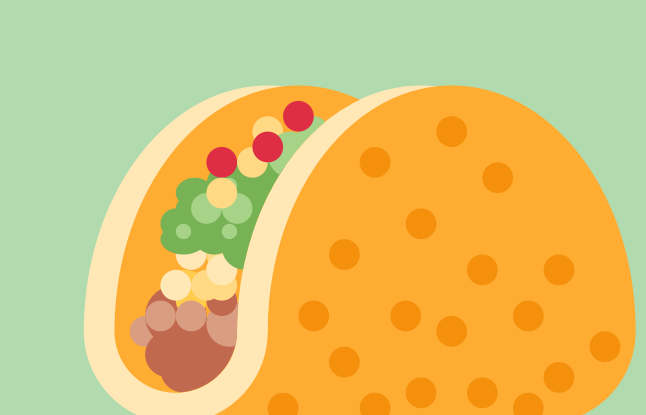
53% of students did not have a reliable source of income during the 2021-2022 school year



93% of students perceived that the cost of food staples had risen within the past school year



Overall, students did not perceive that forms of transportation and living alone had an effect on student's food insecurity status



Conclusions

- **Students agree that rising costs of food staples and income may be important factors in perceived food insecurity among UCSD students**
- Other factors to be considered: mental health, lack of time and knowledge

Policy Implications

- The deployment of advertisements throughout social media and email to promote **food pantry locations** and **food assistance programs** (CalFresh) would be beneficial to students in preventing food insecurity

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References

Weaver, R. R., Vaughn, N. A., Hendricks, S. P., McPherson-Myers, P. E., Jia, Q., Willis, S. L., & Rescigno, K. P. (2020). University student food insecurity and academic performance. *Journal of American College Health*, 68(7), 727–733. <https://doi.org/10.10881.2019.1600522>