

Assessment of UCSD On-Campus Food Insecurity and CalFresh Enrollment via Social Media Promotion Initiative Implementation

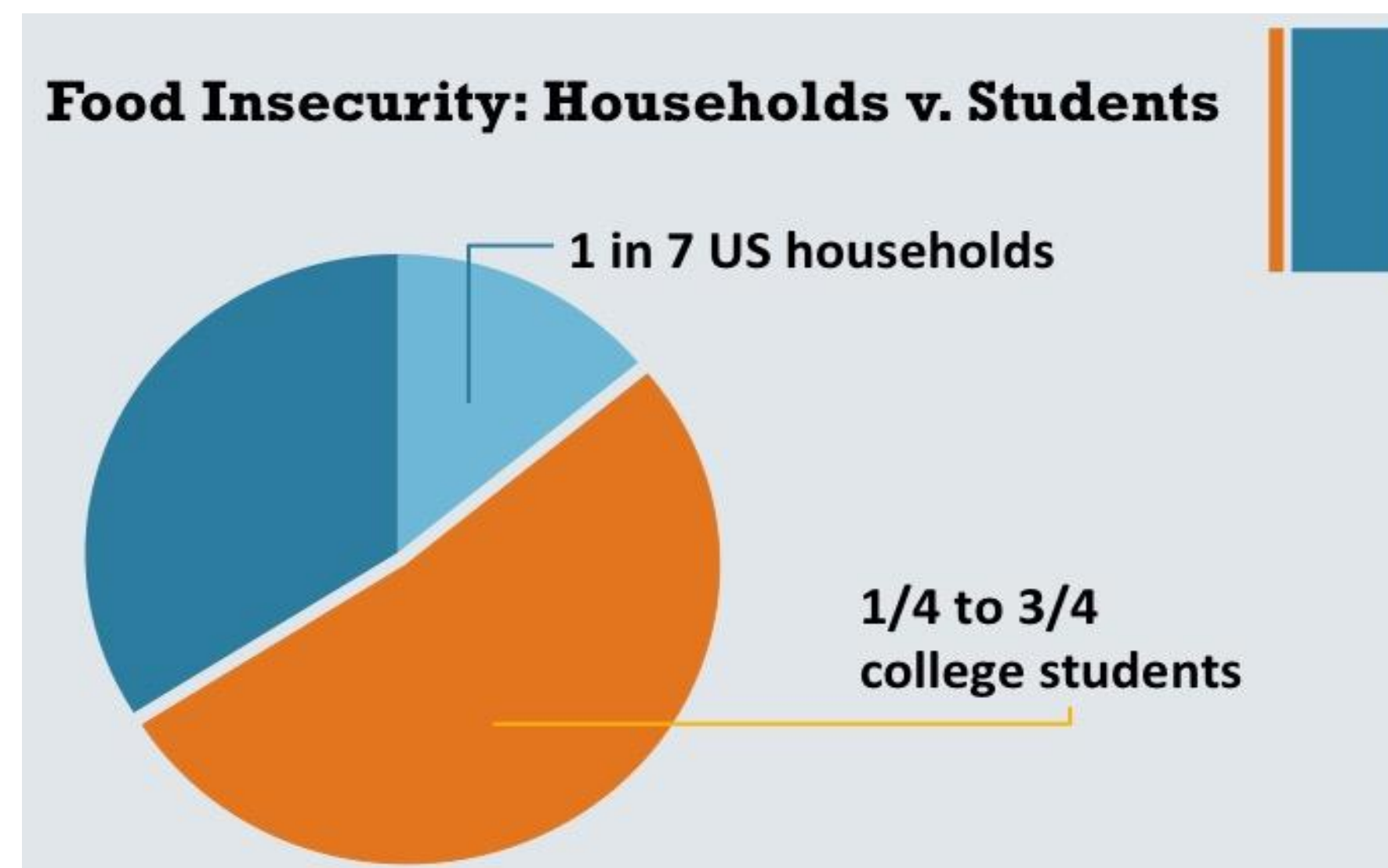
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Background

- In the U.S., rates of food insecurity are higher among college students than the general population.¹
- At UCSD, about 30% of students reported being impacted by food insecurity.²
- More than 57% of low-income, at-risk, food insecure students are eligible but are not enrolled in SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), known as CalFresh for California.³
- Food insecurity among college students not only affects physical health but also mental health, social health, and academics.

Figure 1.⁴



Objective

Our objective was to provide UCSD students information about the CalFresh program and the ease of applying, as well as increase the number of CalFresh applicants. A social media promotion initiative was our gateway to connecting with college students at UCSD amidst the current events.



Methodology

I. Establish Partnerships

We initially contacted The Hub Basic Needs Center at UC San Diego to connect with their CalFresh Team and develop a visual that would help students to determine their potential eligibility. However, since they had already finished this type of visual, we decided to focus our project on promotion of this visual.



II. Disseminate Eligibility Visual Online

As we were faced with the COVID-19 public health issue, we focused solely on promoting our visual online via The Hub's Instagram. The posted visual contains information on eligibility, The Hub's unique CalFresh application link and contact information, and what to expect after submitting an application.

III. Social Media Promotion Initiative

After The Hub posted the eligibility visual on their Instagram account, we reached out to 30 UCSD student organizations and resource centers and asked if they would repost the visual on their Instagram stories for 24 hours.

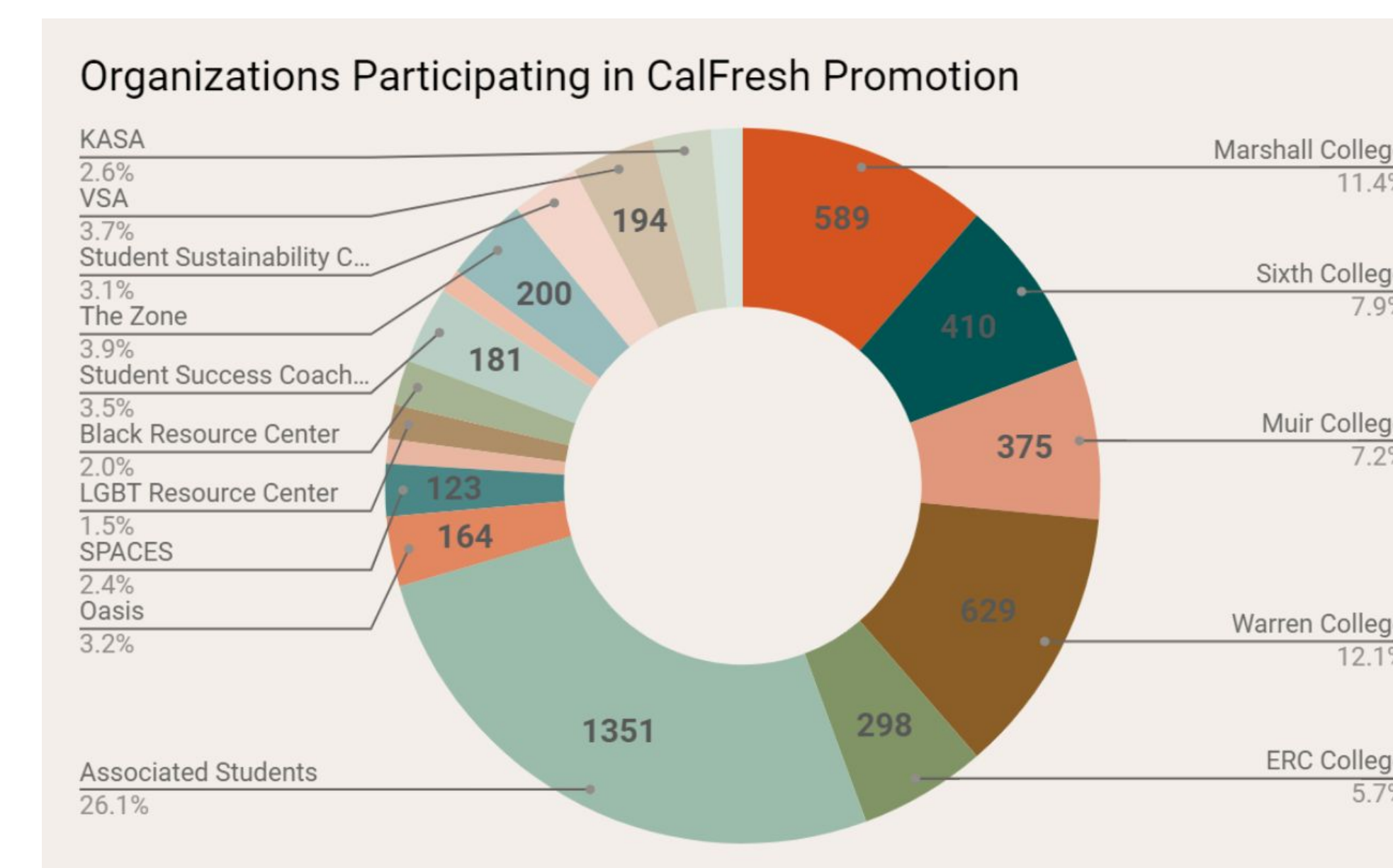
IV. Data Evaluation

Using the data from the specific link that The Hub provided as well as the total view count from the organizations, we evaluated the effectiveness of this visual. We examined the totals of CalFresh applications submitted each month from March through May, compared the differences between the months, and attempted to determine the cause of those differences. We also collected the view count of the Instagram stories.

Results

- After The Hub posted their visual, only **17 out of the 30** UCSD student organizations and resource centers reposted the visual on their Instagram stories. We reached over **5,000 total views**.

Figure 2. UCSD Organizations Participating in CalFresh Promotion



- In May, there were a total of **79 CalFresh applications submitted** using The Hub's specific link, whereas in March and April, there were 53 and 50. There were 29 additional CalFresh applications in between April and May.

Figure 3. Number of CalFresh Applications Submitted By Month

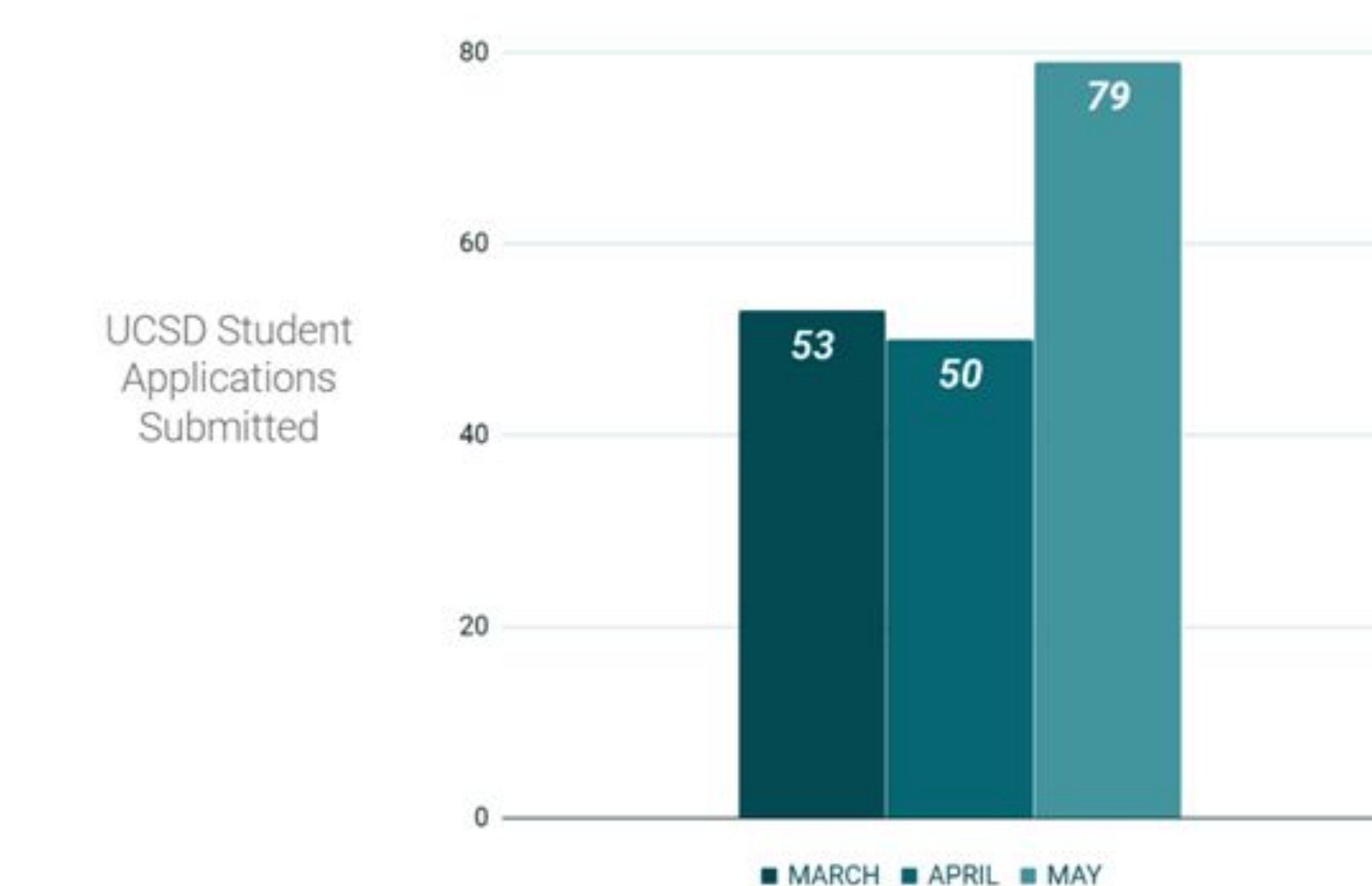


Figure 4. Organizations that Participated



Conclusion

Through the use of social media marketing and collaboration with The Hub, as well as UCSD student organizations, this project has found how influential these entities on campus are to combat and reduce food insecurity among their students.

Over 5,000 views of the CalFresh visual post was reached on Instagram which may have contributed to the overall increase of CalFresh applications in May.

We learned that:

- Social Media is a very effective way to promote and reach students during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Learn to be flexible with stakeholders and reach out to as many organizations as possible.
- Eligibility criteria during COVID-19 has been evolving to accept more applicants.

Policy Implications

- UCSD needs to address the food insecurity gap and underutilization of resources like The Hub, Andy's Pantry etc.
 - Changes must be made due to the pandemic.
 - Help could come from the campus resource centers like The Hub, student organizations & the CalFresh Outreach Team.
- CalFresh eligibility requirements are always changing,
 - Setting a process in place for the advertisement/promotion of these changes
- Additional help can come from providing a way for students to track their own eligibility
 - Create accounts to keep track via The Hub.

References

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