# Food insecurity and the knowledge and use of UCSD's food security safety net among public health students, February 2024

FMPH 196AH BSPH honors Practicum students

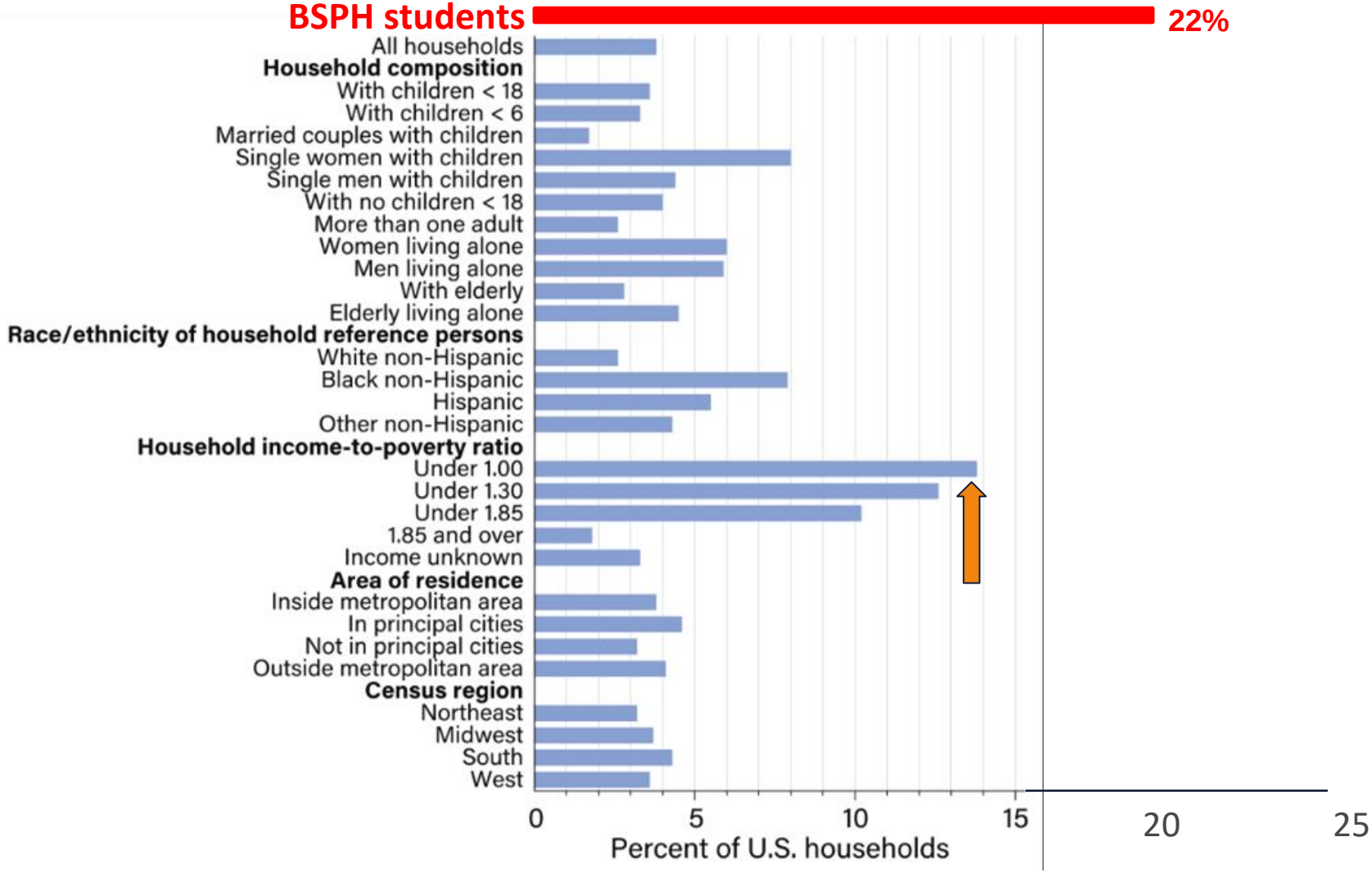
March 12, 2024

# Why this topic?

- Last year's BSPH honors practicum survey of senior capstone students included food security module
- Found overall food insecurity level based on USDA 6-item questionnaire was 38%, with 22% in the most extreme category of very low food security
- Similar to UC- and UCSD-wide biennial UCUES survey results BUT more than 5 TIMES higher than for California as a whole
- Found strong association with student financial status and that food-insecure students had poorer academic performance

# Why this topic?

**Prevalence of very low food security, by selected household characteristics, 2021**



# Why this topic?

Project for this year's cohort

- Assess current levels of food insecurity and delve further into economic risk factors for very low food security
- Deep-dive into students' knowledge and use of the food security safety net at UCSD
- Examine obstacles, including beliefs about programs, to greater use of the safety-net programs

# Four team projects focusing on different safety net components

- CalFresh (Fauci Fan Club)
- The Triton Food Pantry (Egg-cellent Evaluators)
- The Food Recovery Network (S.T.A.R)
- Other safety-net resources (iTable, YesFood, emergency grocery gift cards, emergency Triton cash) + interest in Dining Dollar donations (Fantastic Five)

# Survey objectives: learning exercise for students + produce useful data for the Basic Needs Center

- Learn to work effectively in teams
- Provide an A-Z experience in conducting an evaluation
  - Construct logic models
  - Work with stakeholders to develop evaluation questions
  - Design a survey instrument to answer these questions
  - Collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative data
  - Synthesize and present findings to key stakeholders and scientific audience

# The study population

- Senior public health capstone students (N=235)
- Students in FMPH 40 (N=88) and FMPH 50 (N=188) to capture students in their first years at UCSD and limited number of non-majors

# A bit on the methods

- Questionnaire created in Qualtrics (7-10 minutes)
- Close-ended questions on each safety-net program
- Free-listing on CalFresh, Food Pantry, Food Recovery Network
- Distributed via direct emails + announcements in FMPH 40, 50, and all BSPH capstone sections
- Repeated reminders over 10 days
- Extra credit given by profs for individual and/or overall participation above a certain threshold (usually 90%)
- 76% response rate!
- Analyses in EpiInfo according to teams' analysis plans

# A few additional methodologic notes

- Primarily descriptive with some bivariate analyses (no multivariate yet!)
- Denominators vary (no forced responses, skip patterns)
- Focus on VERY LOW food security, which requires 5-6 positive responses to USDA 6-item questionnaire

# A profound thank you in advance to…..

- Our stakeholders:  Alicia Magallanes and Sarah Feteih of the Basic Needs Center
- My fellow BSPH professors:  Cheryl Anderson, Divya Reddy, Britta Larson, Becky Marquez, France Nguyen-Grozavu, Sally Romero, Matt Stone, Ann White, Chris Zoumas
- Rebecca Fielding-Miller for teaching my students a great new qualitative technique
- The 370 students who participated in the survey
- Dina Rodgers and Richard Garfein for great their behind-the-scenes support and advice
- My amazing BSPH honors practicum students who have worked day and night to put together their presentations for today.

# Today's presentations

- Characteristics of the study population (S.T.A.R.)
- Food insecurity prevalence and risk factors (Egg-cellent Evaluators)
- CalFresh (Fauci Fan Club)
- The Triton Food Pantry (Egg-cellent Evaluators)
- Food Recovery Network (S.T.A.R.)
- Emergency safety net programs and Dining Dollars (Fantastic Five)
- Q and A

# Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Team A (Egg-cellent Evaluators): Kat Ehlen, Natalie Kaplanyan, Jenny Kezios, Purba Khan, and Daisy West

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# Demographic Characteristics

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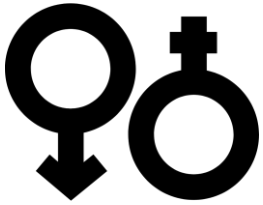
# Survey respondent characteristics

## Total response rate: 76%, 370/486



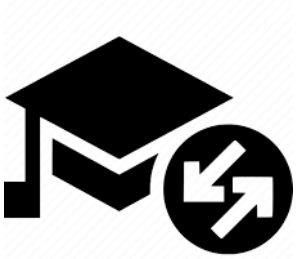
Female
**80%**

First generation
**55%**

GPA >3.5
**53%**

UCSD

On-campus residents
**48%**



Transfer
**27%**

International
**3%**

Note: 85% of survey respondents are BSPH majors

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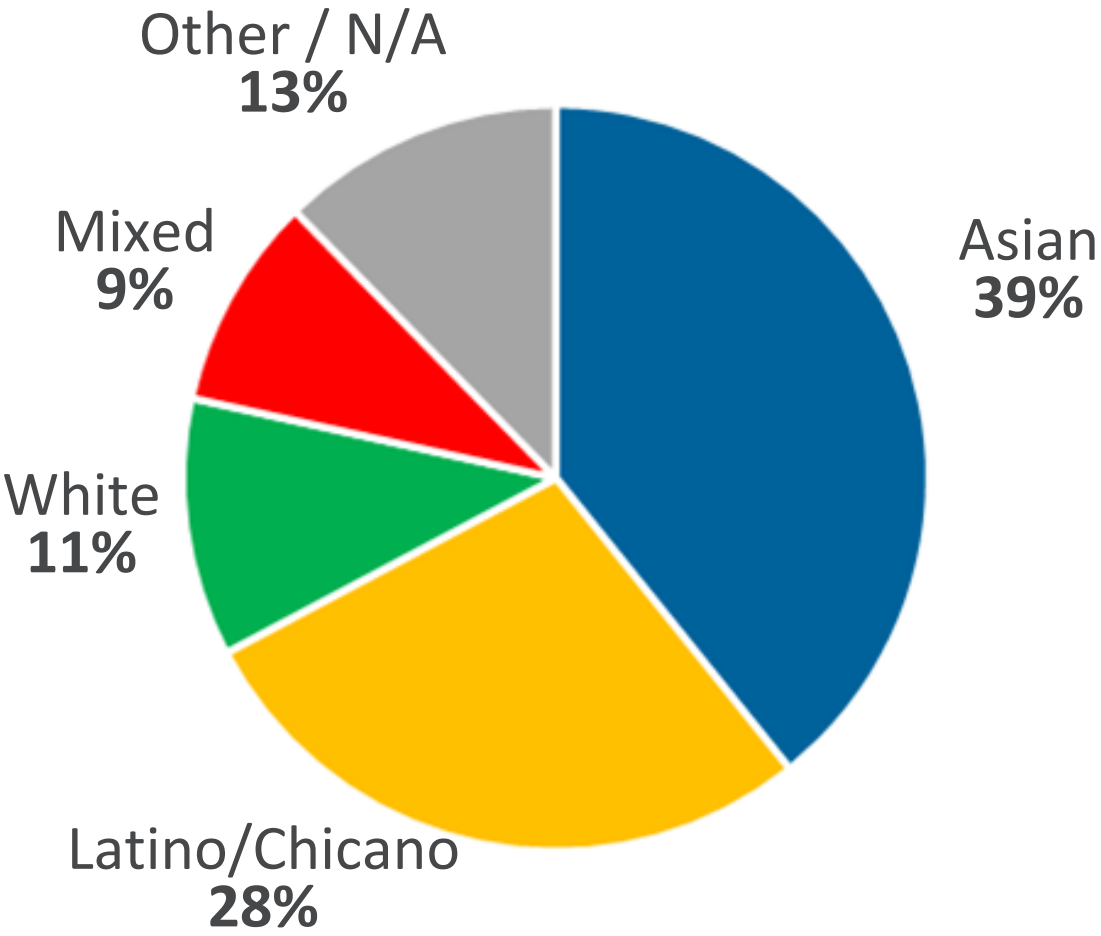
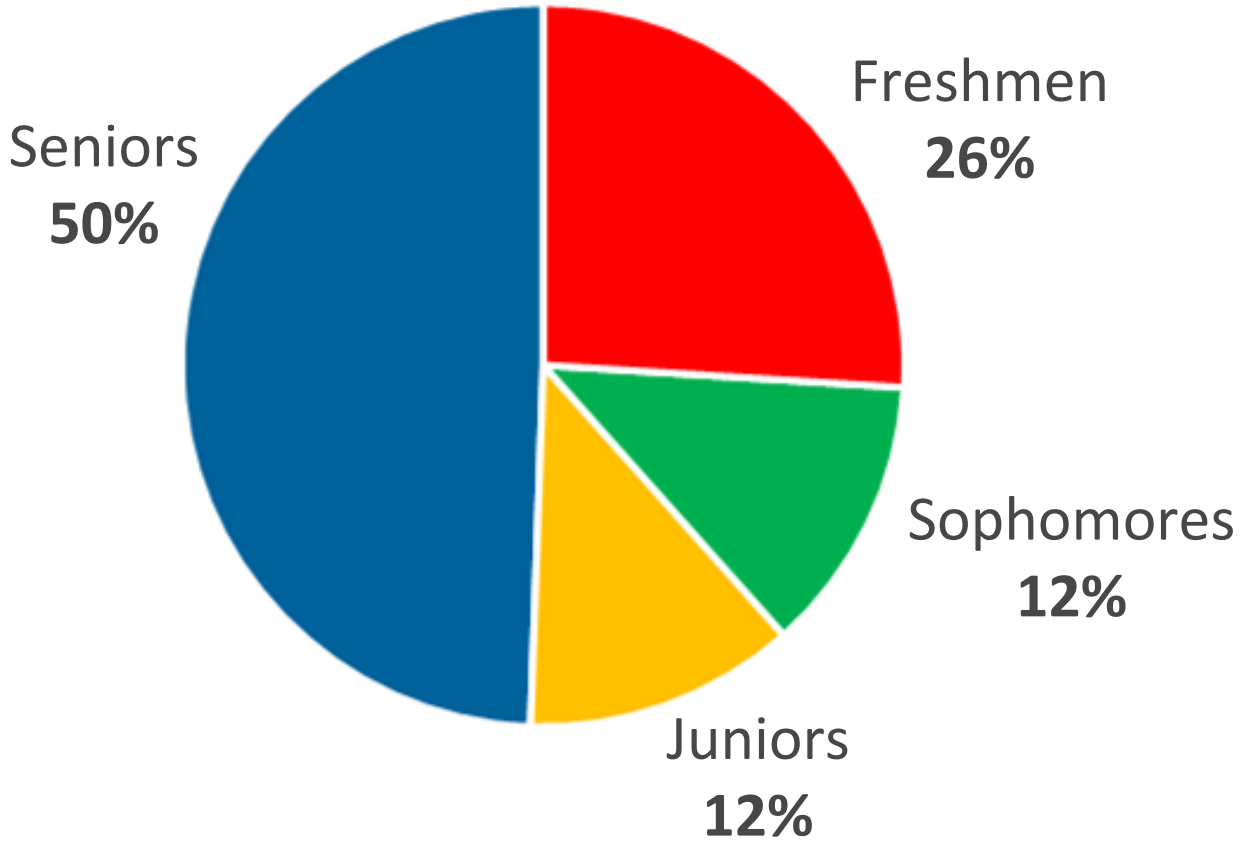
# Race/Ethnicity of survey respondents



# Grade level of survey respondents



# Financial characteristics of survey respondents

Financial Aid
**75%**

Paid Job
**46%**

Working 20+ hours/week
**10%**

Financial Worries
**56%**

# Conclusions

- 76% response rate
- Survey population generally representative of BSPH major, but not representative of the UCSD population
- Higher representation of females and first generation students among survey respondents than UCSD population
- Lower representation of international students

STAR presents

# Food Security

Shria Bulusu, Tomi Oginni, Amy Trinh, Rachel Kitay

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# Prevalence of food insecurity

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# USDA Food Security Questionnaire (1)

During the current 2023-24 academic year:

| I was worried whether my food would run out before I got more. | The food I bought just didn't last and I didn't have money to get more. | Did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food? |
|---|---|---|
| o Often True<br>o Sometimes True<br>o Rarely True<br>o Never True | o Often True<br>o Sometimes True<br>o Rarely True<br>o Never True | o Yes<br>o No |
| + 1 | + 1 | + 1 |
| 44% | 33% | 42% |

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# USDA Food Security Questionnaire (2)

During the current 2023-24 academic year:

| Were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food? | Did you ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food? | You indicated that you had cut the size of your meals or skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food. How often does this happen? |
|---|---|---|
| o Yes + 1 | o Yes + 1 | o Almost every month + 1 |
| o No | o No | o Some months, but not every month |
| | | o Only 1 or 2 months |
| 28% | 35% | 73% (97/124) |

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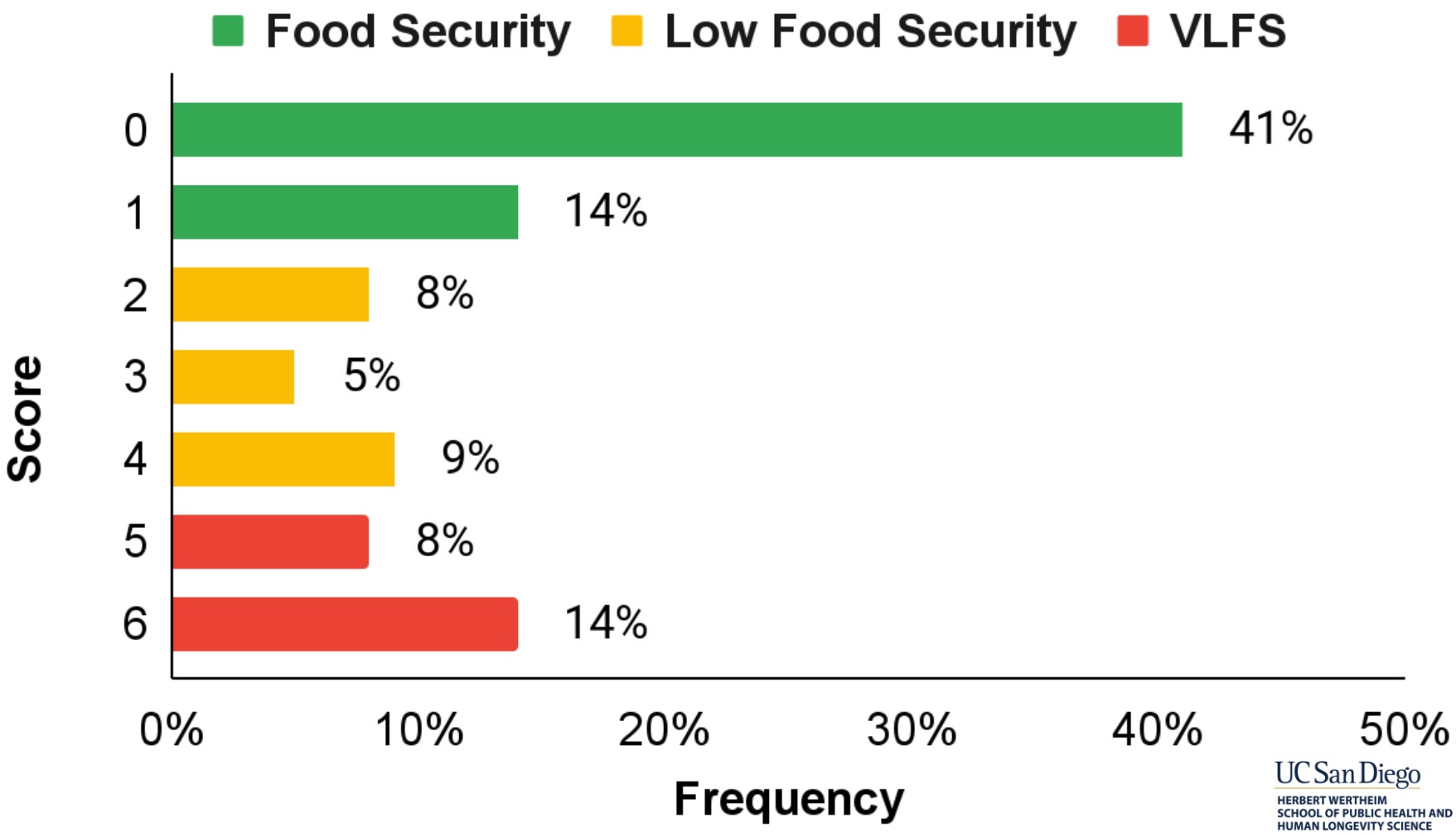
# USDA food security definitions

**Food Security**: Scores of **0-1** indicate high or marginal food security

**Food Insecurity:** Scores of **2-6**

- **Low Food Security**: Scores of **2-4** indicate reduced quality, variety, or desirability of the diet
- **Very Low Food Security (VLFS)**: Scores of **5-6** indicate disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake

# USDA questionnaire score distributions (n=348)

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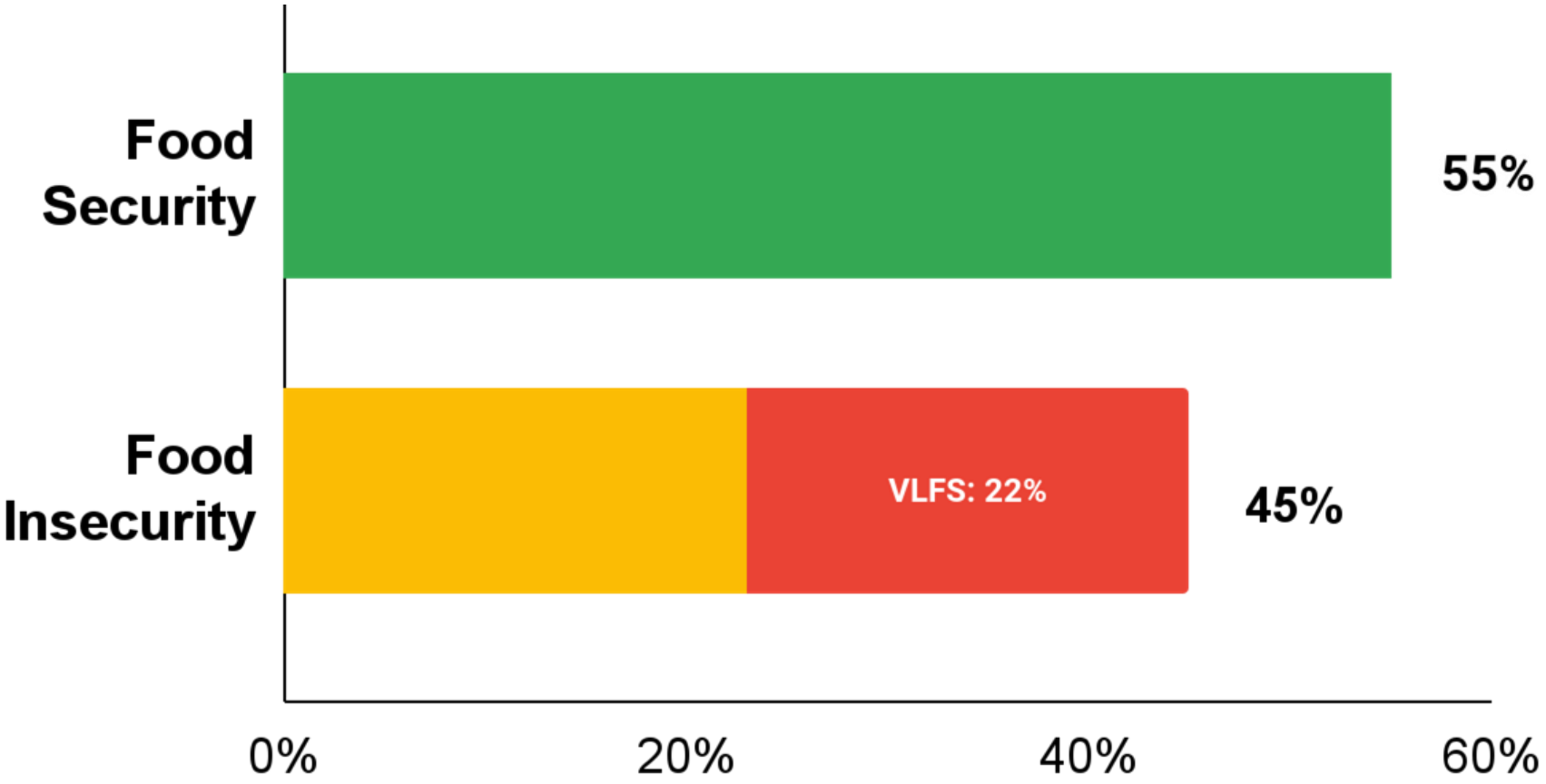
# Food security status (n=348)

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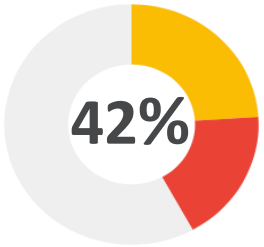
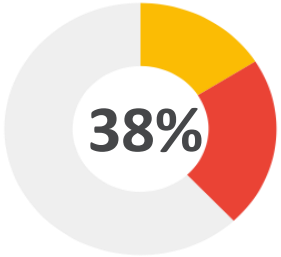
# Context

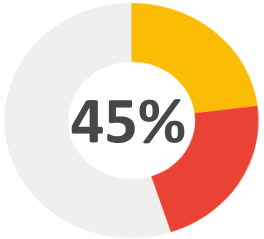
## Food Insecurity at UCSD




**2022** (UCUES Survey)

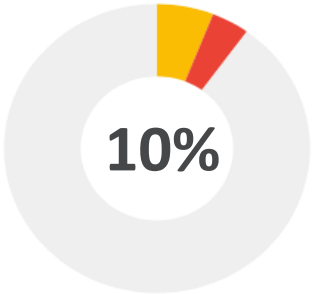



**2023** (BSPH Survey)




**2024** (BSPH Survey)

## Food Insecurity in California




**2019-2021**

Rates of food insecurity at UCSD are **4.5 times** higher than in the general California population

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# Demographic risk factors for very low food security

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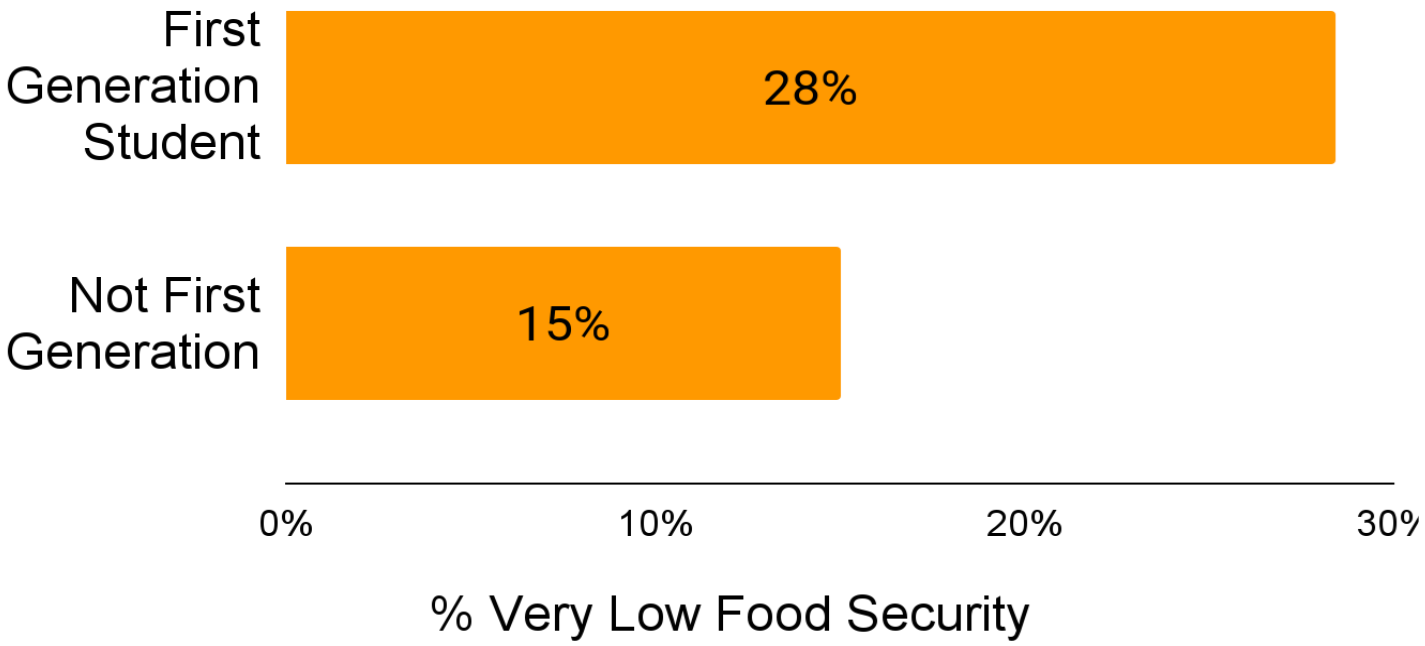
# First generation students (n=348)




First-generation students were **1.9** times more likely to experience very low food security

p = 0.002

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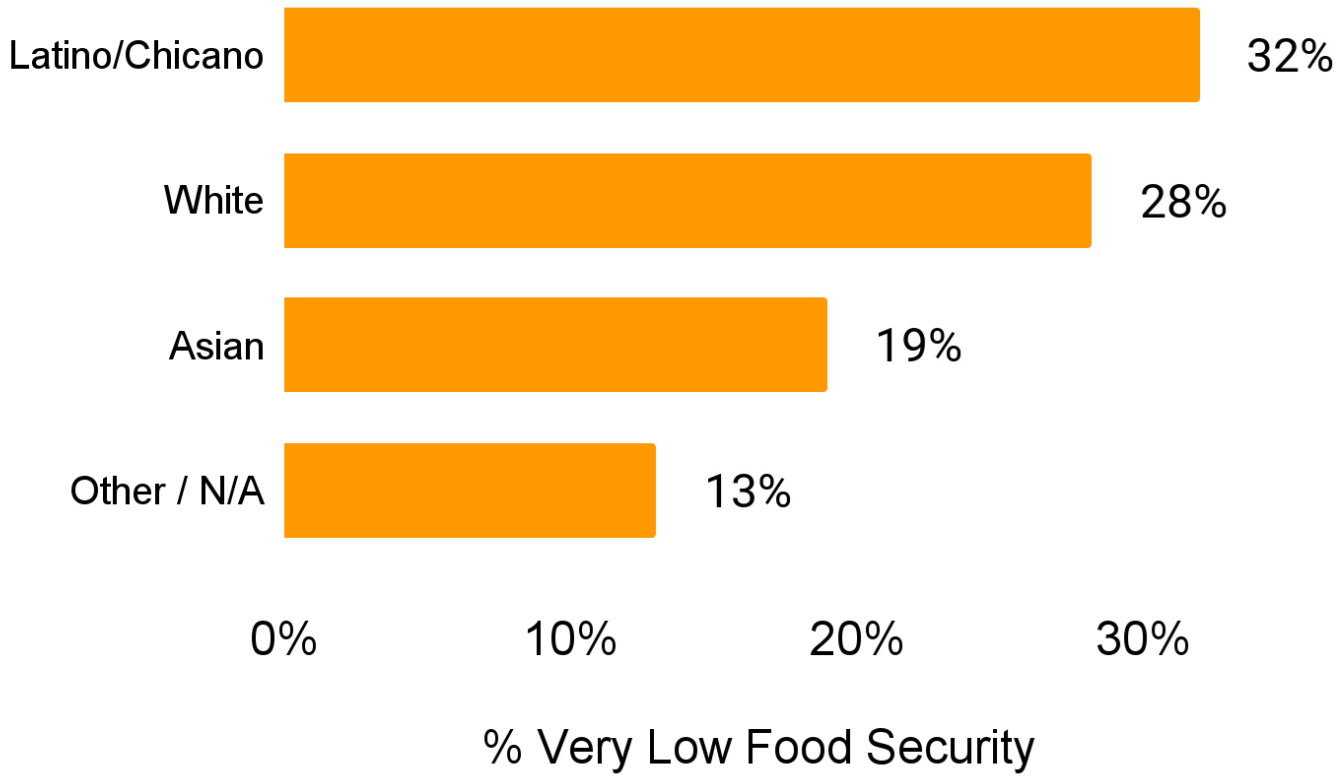
# Race/ethnicity (n=348)




p=0.04

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# Rates of very low food security did not differ significantly by:

Gender

Transfer status

Residency on or off campus

Graduation year

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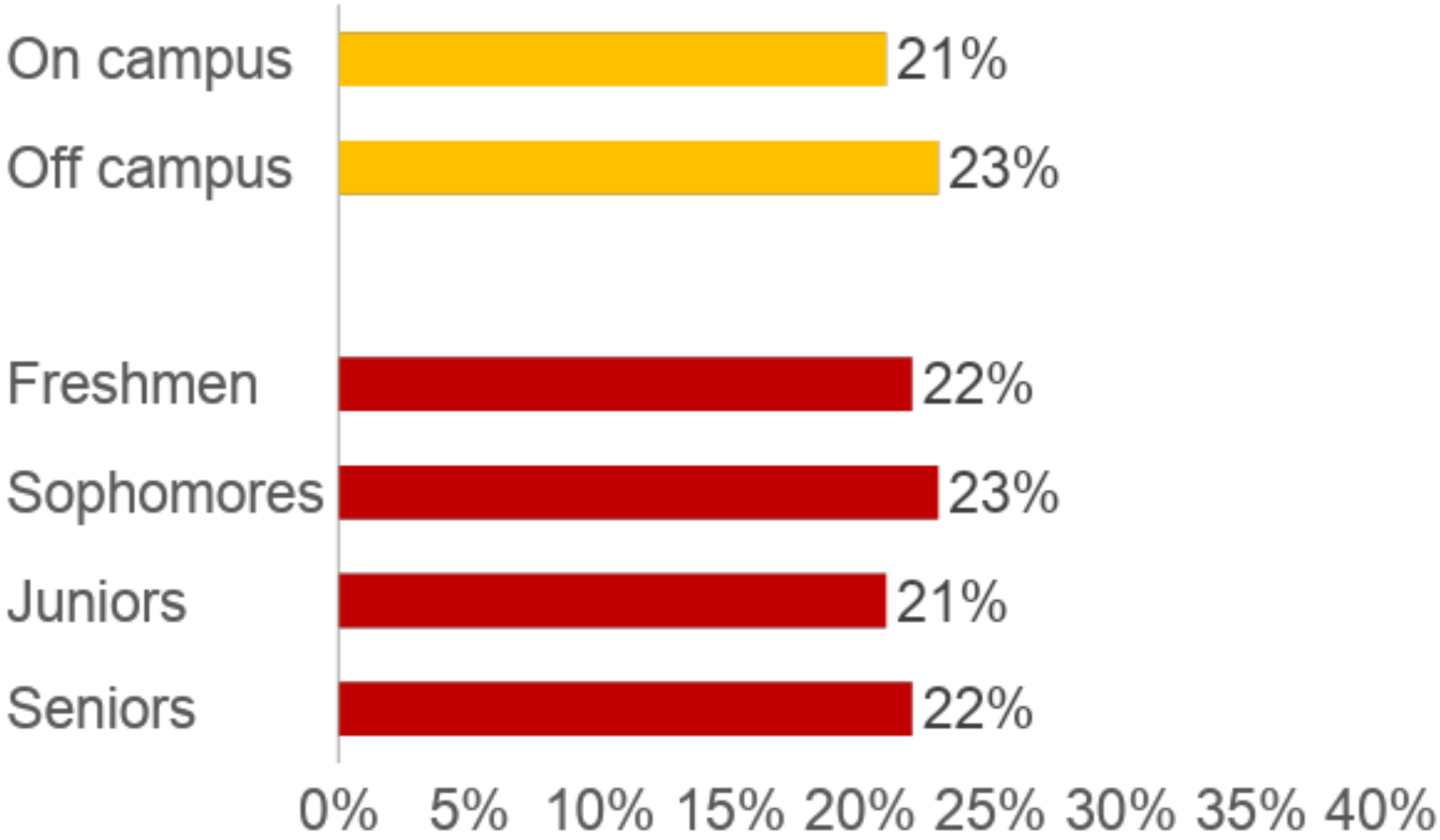
# No difference by residence at UCSD or graduation year:



# Financial risk factors for very low food security

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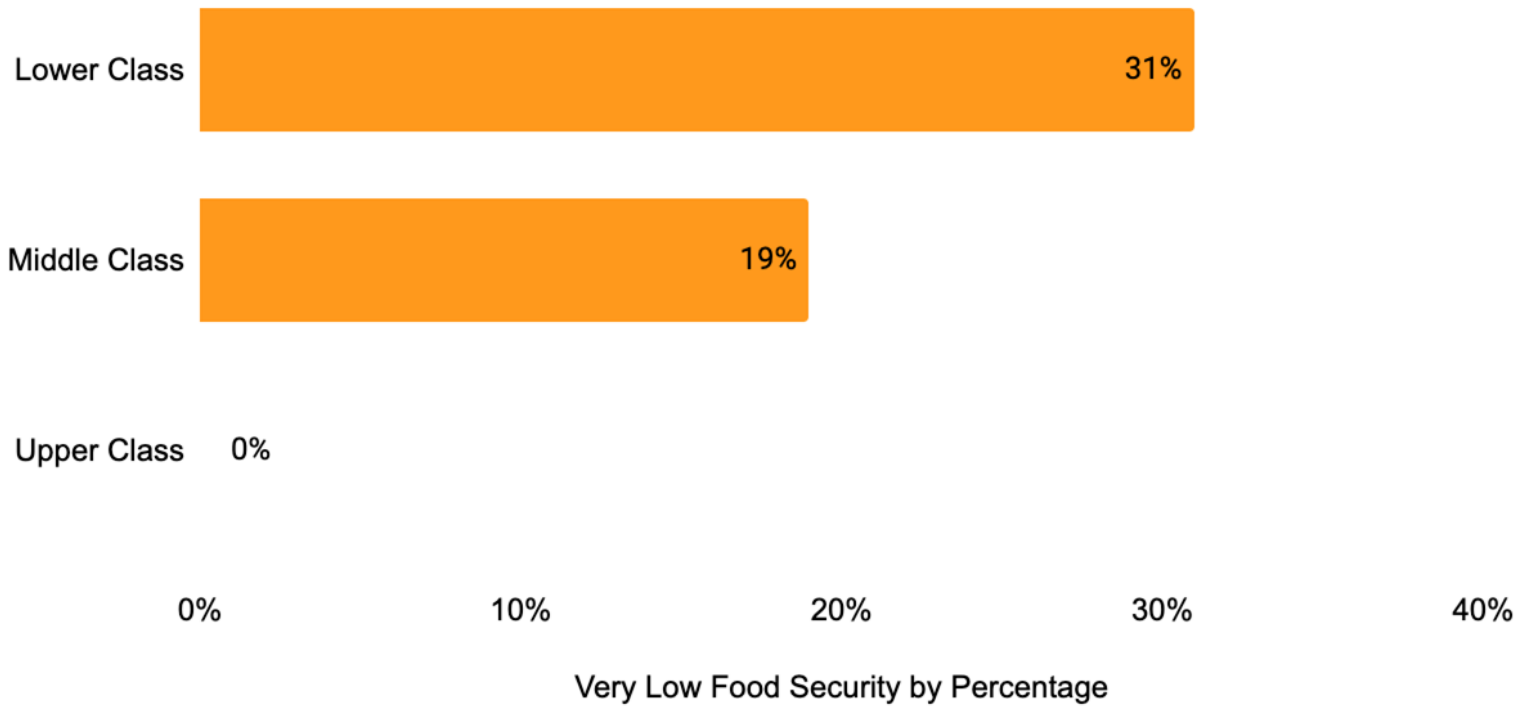
# Family income (n=348)




Students from families with lower income were at greater risk of having VLFS

p = 0.0005

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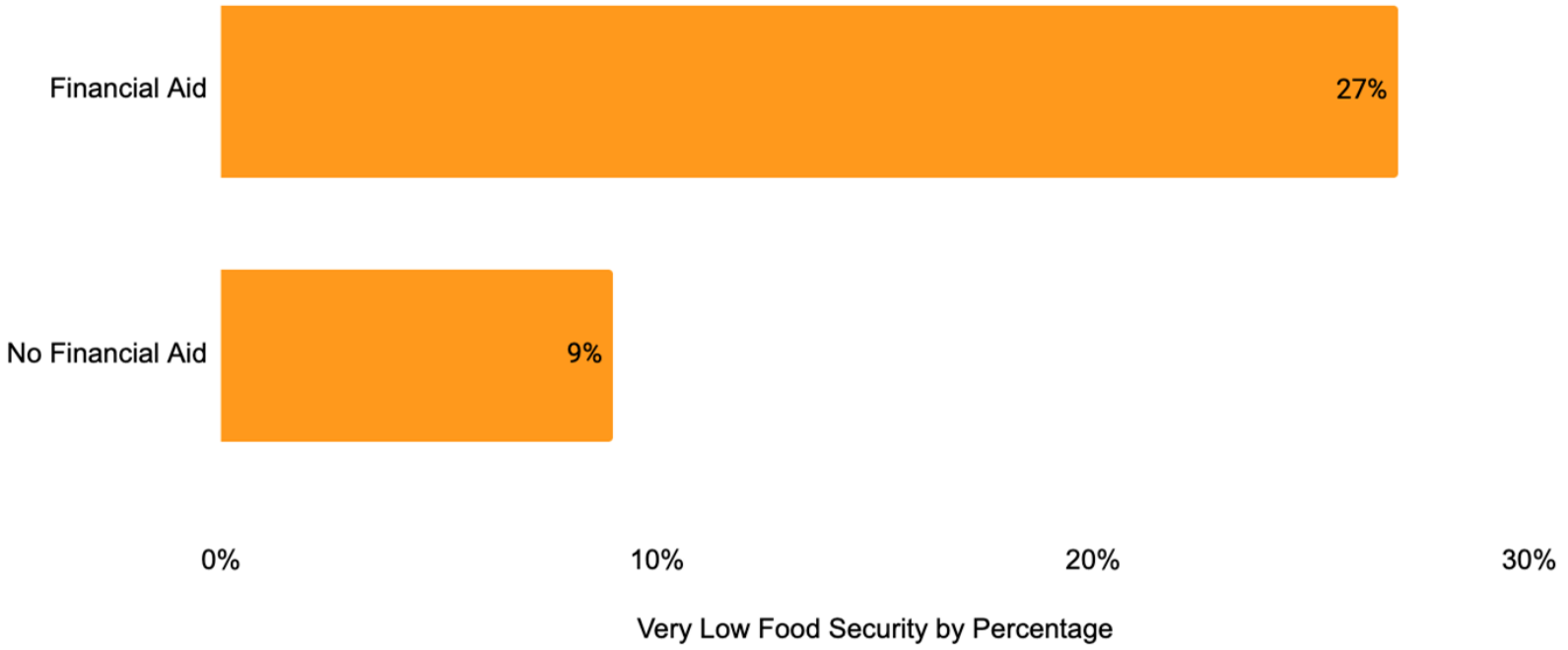
# Financial aid status (n=346)




Students on financial aid were 3 times more likely to experience VLFS

p = 0.00006

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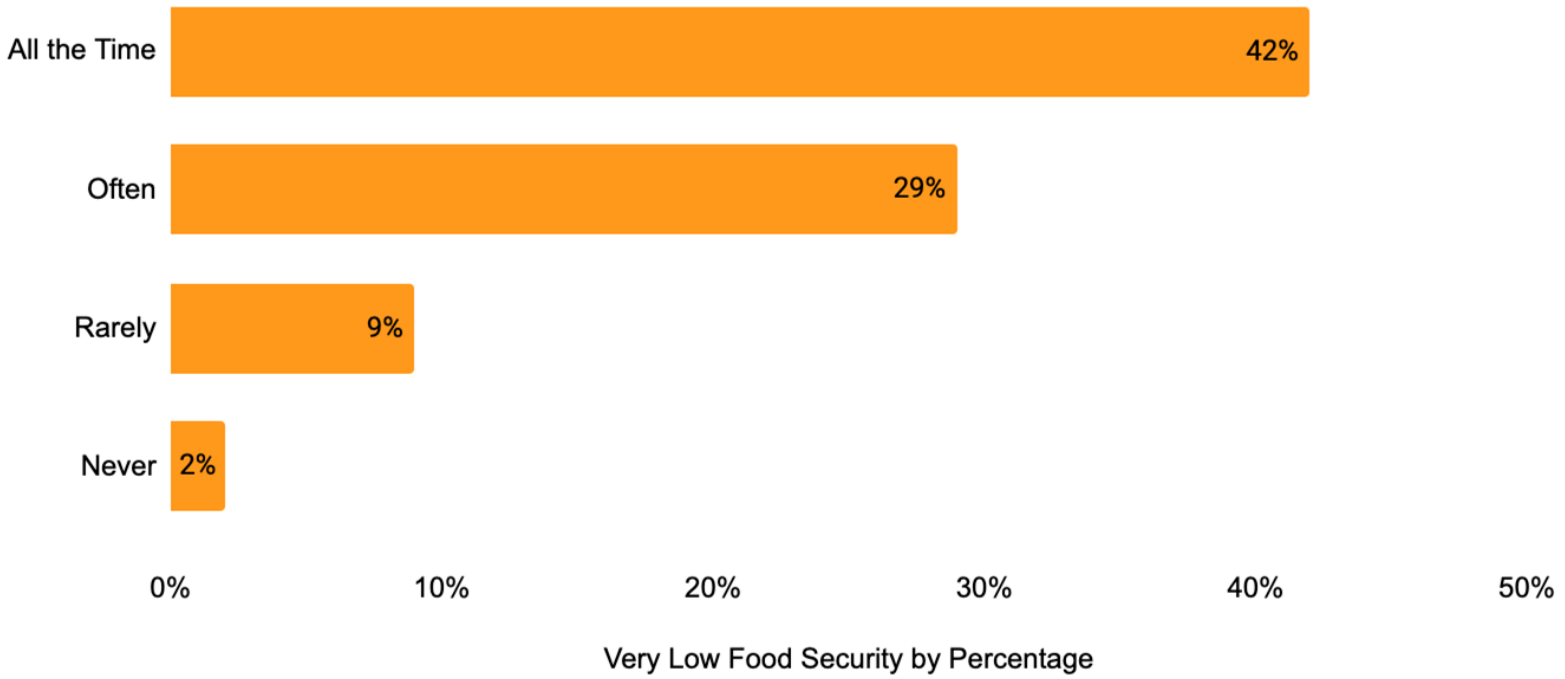
# Concern Over Debt and Financial Circumstances (n=348)




There was a strong association between the frequency of worry about debt and financial circumstances and VLFS

$p < 0.00001$

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# The impact of very low food security

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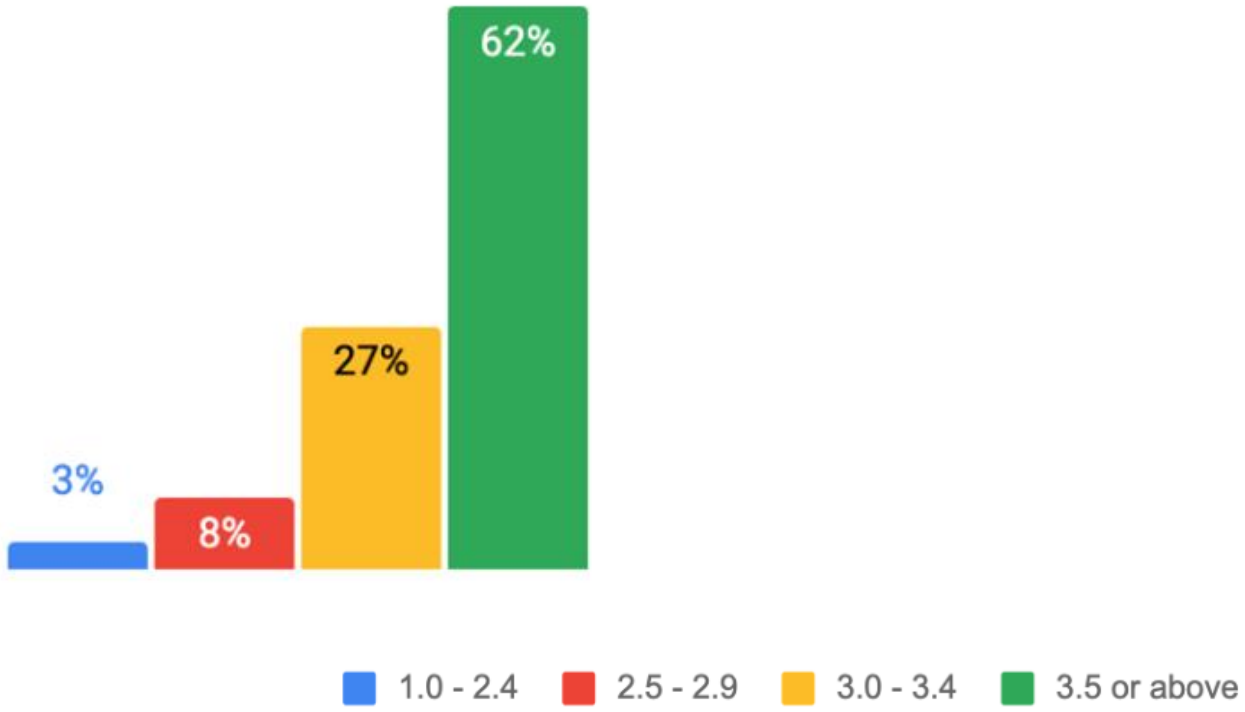
# GPA and food security (n=344)

## Food Secure/ Low Food Security

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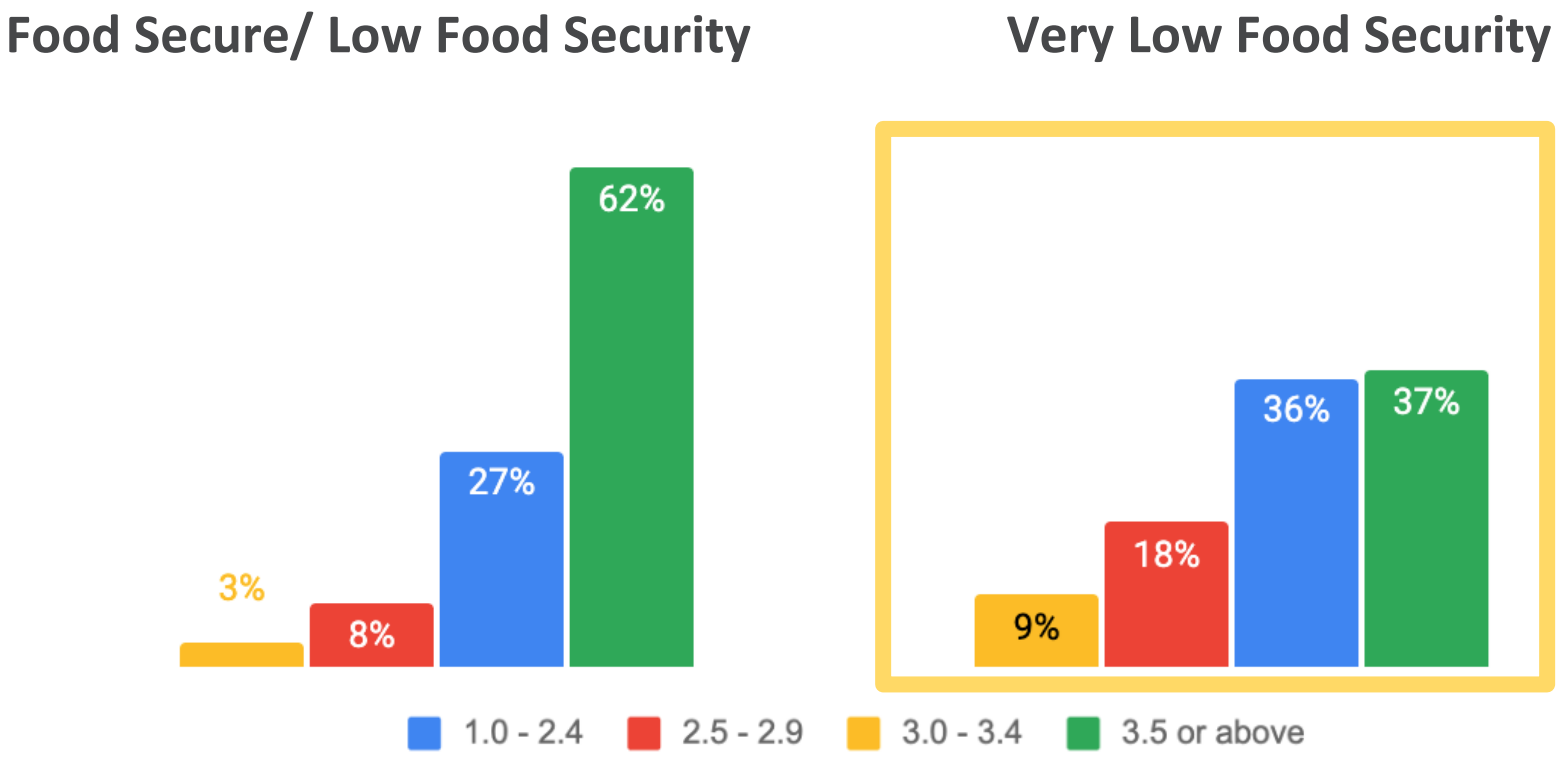
# GPA and food security (n=344)




**Students with VLFS less likely to attain a GPA of 3.5+, p= 0.0002**

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# Recommendations

- Ongoing monitoring of VLFS rates
- Adequate financial aid to meet the cost of attending UCSD
- An increased focus on Basic Needs Hub services as a safety net for students

# Thank you!

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# CalFresh

**Fauci Fan Club:**
Sarah Bonilla, Kristina Flores, Aliya Ghalili, Cali He, Kaleb Tesfai

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# What is CalFresh?

- California's version of the Federal Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Provides low-income individuals/families with an electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card to purchase groceries
- Eligible UCSD students can receive up to $291/month
- UCSD student eligibility criteria:
  - US citizen AND San Diego resident AND have an individual monthly income below $2430/month AND meets at least one additional criteria:
    - Awarded federal work-study
    - Works more than 20 hours/week
    - Belongs to an LPIE major (Local Programs that Increase Employability)
    - +Others

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# What is CalFresh?

- In-person or online application
- Requires submission of:
  - Proof of ID (driver's license, state ID)
  - Proof of income (work stubs, tax forms)
  - Financial aid award letter
  - College class schedule
- Application assistance available from:
  - UCSD Hub Basic Needs staff
  - County staff
- Renewal required every 6 months

**Objective 1**: What percentage of students know about CalFresh, and where did they learn about it?

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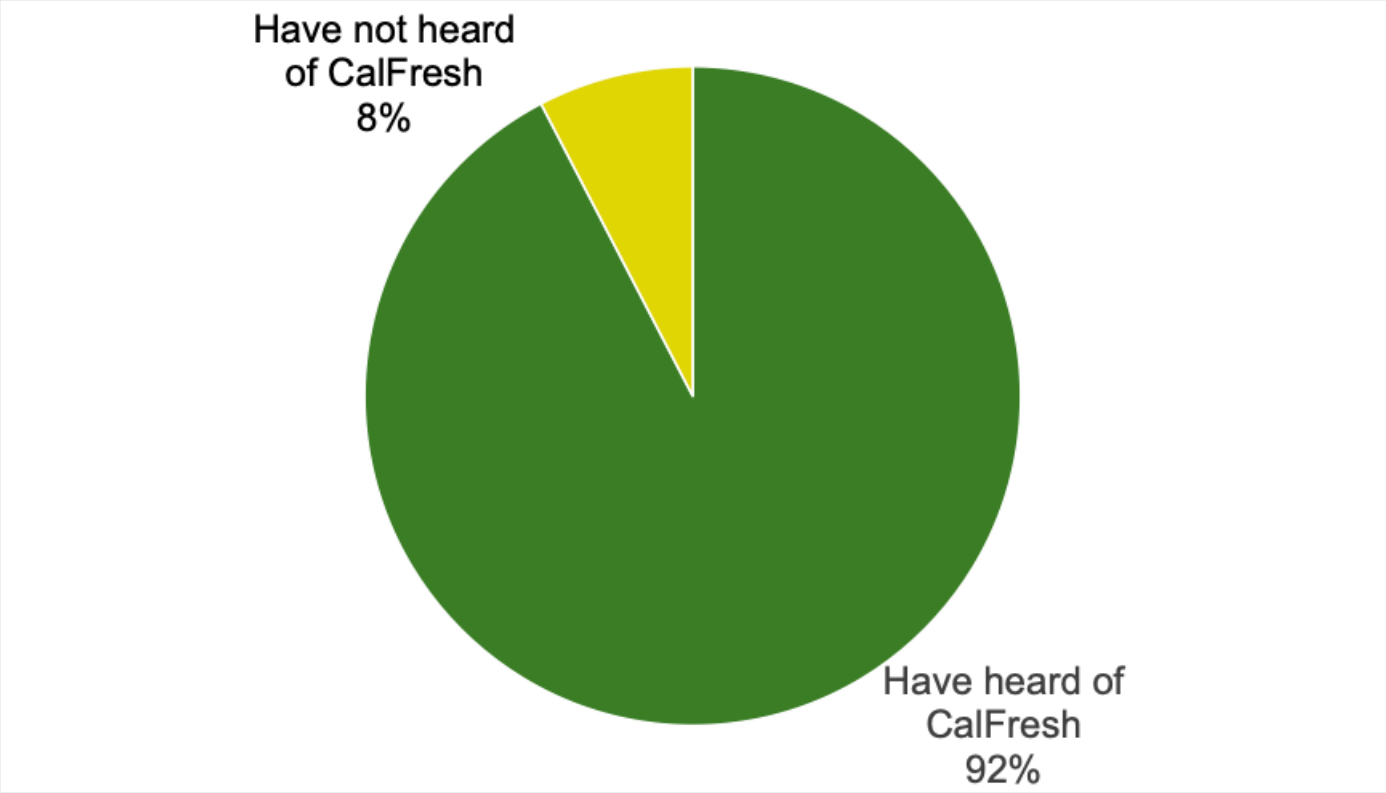
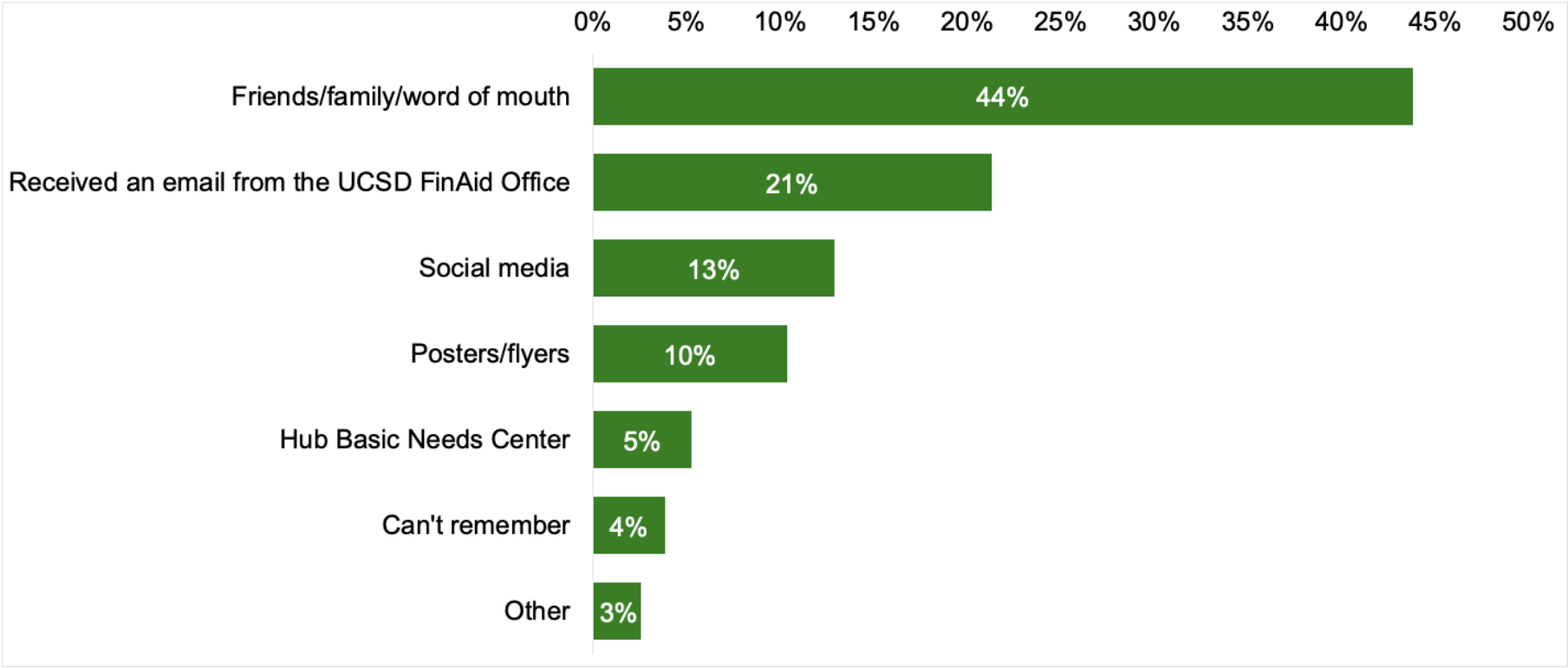
# How many students have heard of CalFresh? (N=366)




**92% of students had heard of CalFresh.**

# How did students hear about CalFresh?




**Almost half (44%) of students heard of CalFresh through family/friends/word of mouth.**

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# Objective 2:

What percent of survey respondents have applied for CalFresh?
What help did they receive in applying?
What percent of applicants were successfully enrolled?
Did the assistance make a difference in successfully enrolling?

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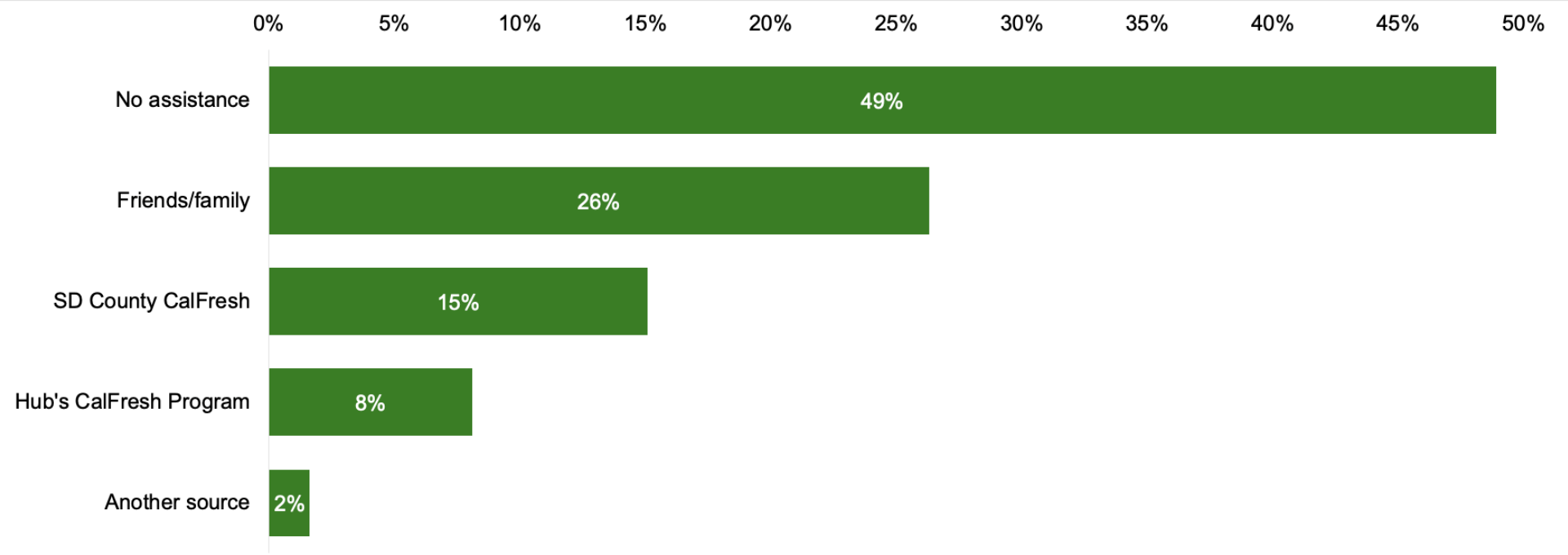
# How many students have applied for CalFresh? (N=366)

**46% of students have applied.**

# CalFresh Application Assistance Support




**Almost half of CalFresh applicants did not receive help with their application, and a quarter of them received support from friends or family.**

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# How many students are currently receiving CalFresh benefits? (N=366)

**Acceptance rate among applicants = 47%**

**21% of all students are currently enrolled in CalFresh.**

# What is the impact of application assistance among students who applied for CalFresh? (N=130)*

**Students who received assistance when applying for CalFresh are 1.5 times more likely to be currently receiving CalFresh benefits compared to students who did not receive assistance (74% vs. 49%, $p<0.002$).**

*Students who were previously on CalFresh excluded from analysis

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**Objective 4:** To what extent has CalFresh helped support students who are enrolled?

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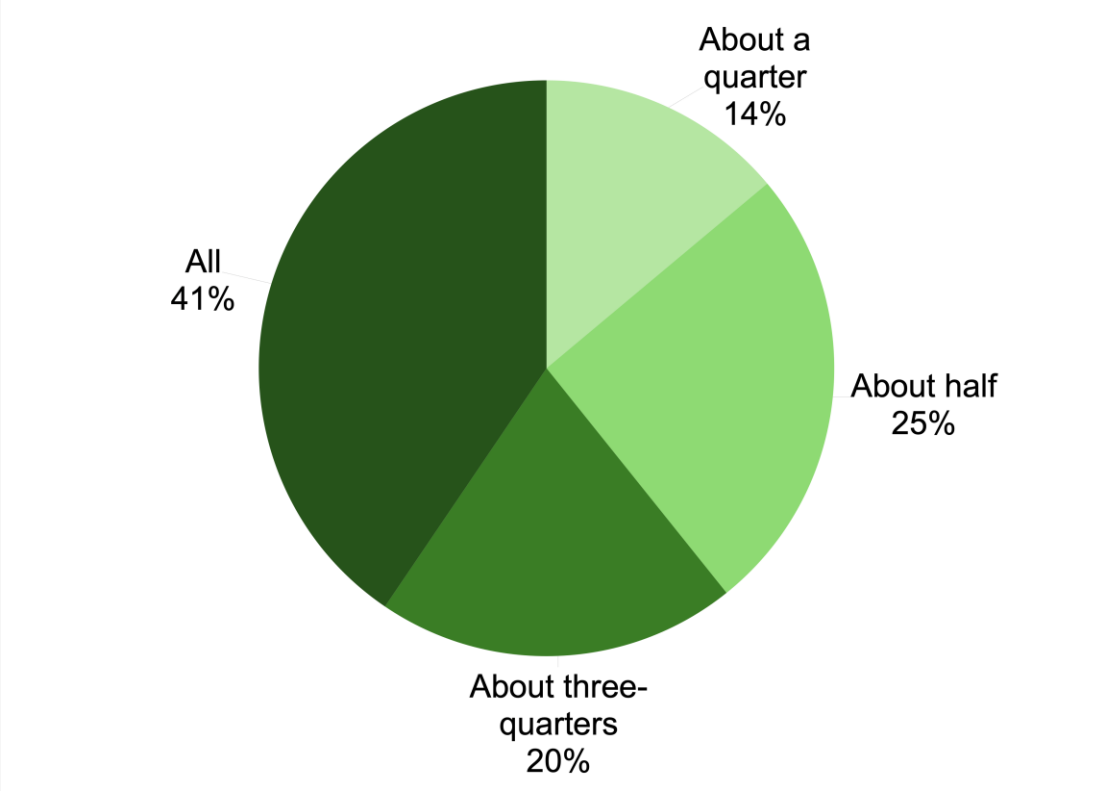
# To what extent does the amount of money a student gets from CalFresh cover their monthly grocery needs?




**41% reported that CalFresh covered ALL of their grocery needs.**

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**Objective 6:** What percent of students may be eligible for CalFresh, and what are the obstacles to their enrollment?

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# How many students are eligible?

- Number of students who are CalFresh eligible difficult to assess
- To estimate, used available demographic data from survey
- Baseline:

  In-state residence (proxy for citizenship/residency) +
  Pell Grant recipient (proxy for low income) AND
  Work-study student OR working >20 hours/week
- LPIE:

  As above, + majoring in Public Health or other LPIE major

# Estimates of potential eligibility

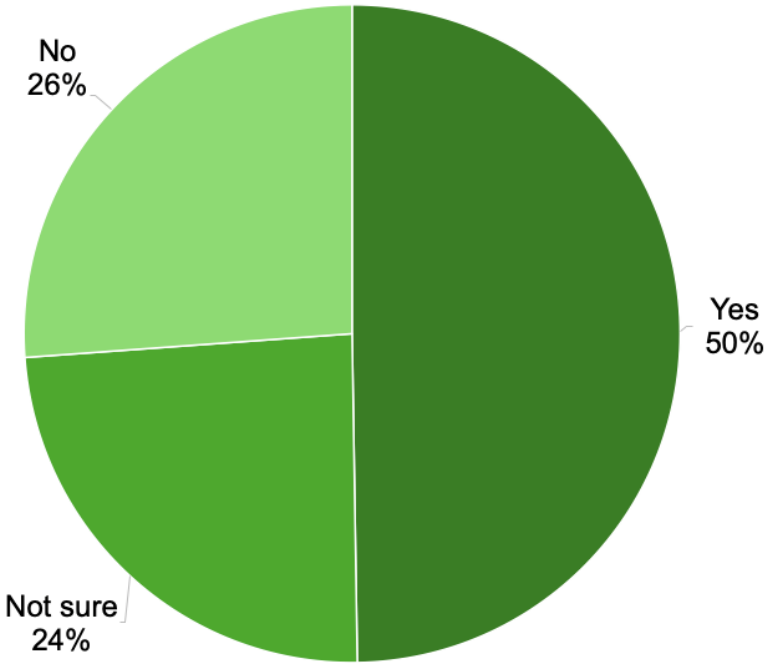
An estimated 21% of all public health students are potentially eligible for CalFresh based on state criteria.

**The public health major LPIE designation nearly doubles the percentage of eligible students to 40%.**

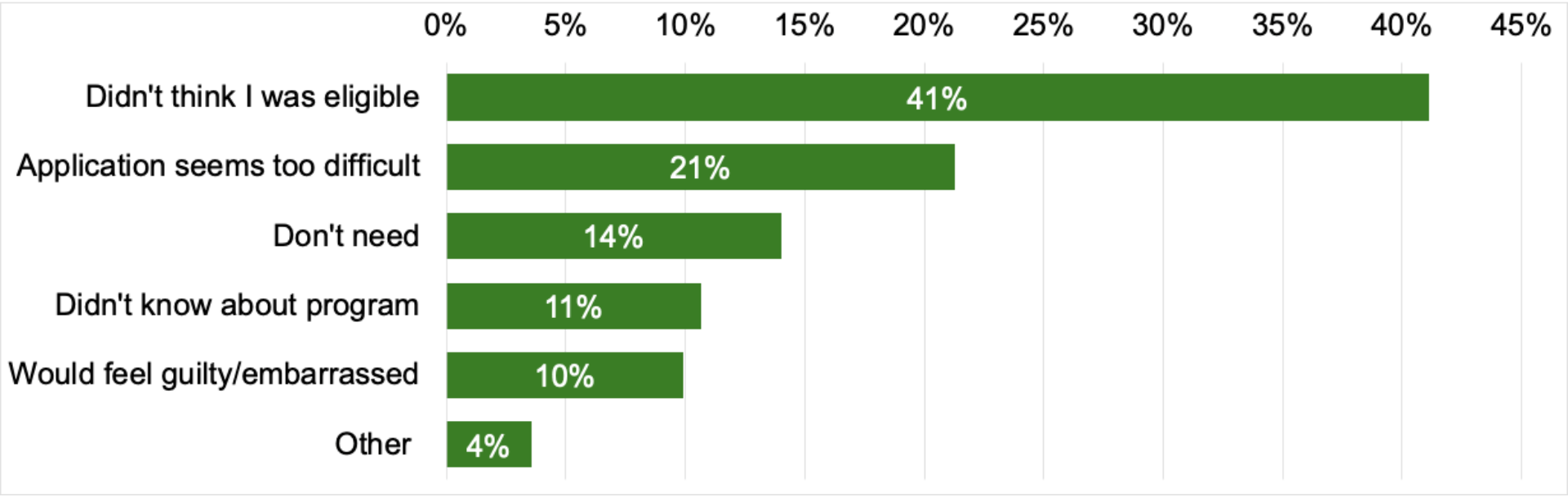
# Obstacles to Enrollment

# Obstacle 1: Do students even know they are eligible for CalFresh? (N=195)

- Students who hadn't heard of or who hadn’t applied for CalFresh were provided with a CalFresh program description and its eligibility criteria.
- Asked whether they thought they might be eligible based on this information
  - Yes, I may be eligible
  - No, I don’t believe I am eligible
  - I am not sure I meet eligibility criteria



# Why hadn’t these students applied?




**Primary reasons are not knowing if they are eligible and the application seeming too difficult.**
**Guilt and stigma not major issues.**

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# Obstacle 2: Difficulties with the application process among students who have applied (N =130)

| Issue | % agree/strongly agree |
|---|---|
| Difficulty getting SD County help | **69%** |
| Application process difficult | 45% |
| Difficulty locating paperwork | 42% |

# Do applicants feel guilty or embarrassed about applying for CalFresh? (N=130)

**75% of those who had applied disagreed or strongly disagreed that they felt guilty or embarrassed about applying for CalFresh benefits.**

# “List up to three words that come to mind when you think about the CalFresh program for college students.”

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# Concluding Remarks

# Conclusions

1. **Almost all** students heard of CalFresh and **nearly half had** applied.
2. Approximately **20% of surveyed students are currently enrolled in CalFresh.**
3. CalFresh acceptance rate was **47%**, although students who received **application assistance had a higher acceptance rate (e.g. Hub support).**
4. Common barriers to applying to CalFresh include **not being aware they are eligible** and **difficulties with the application process.**
5. LPIE criteria inclusion nearly **doubles CalFresh eligibility.**

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# Recommendations

1. Increase student **awareness** of their eligibility

2. Assist UCSD departments with capstone or universal internship programs to apply for **LPIE designation**

3. **Effective application support** through UCSD the Hub Basic Needs Center and SD County CalFresh

# Thank You!

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# Triton Food Pantry

## The Egg-cellent Evaluators

Kat Ehlen, Natalie Kaplanyan, Jenny Kezios, Purba Khan, and Daisy West

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# Objective 1: What percentage of students are aware of the TFP?

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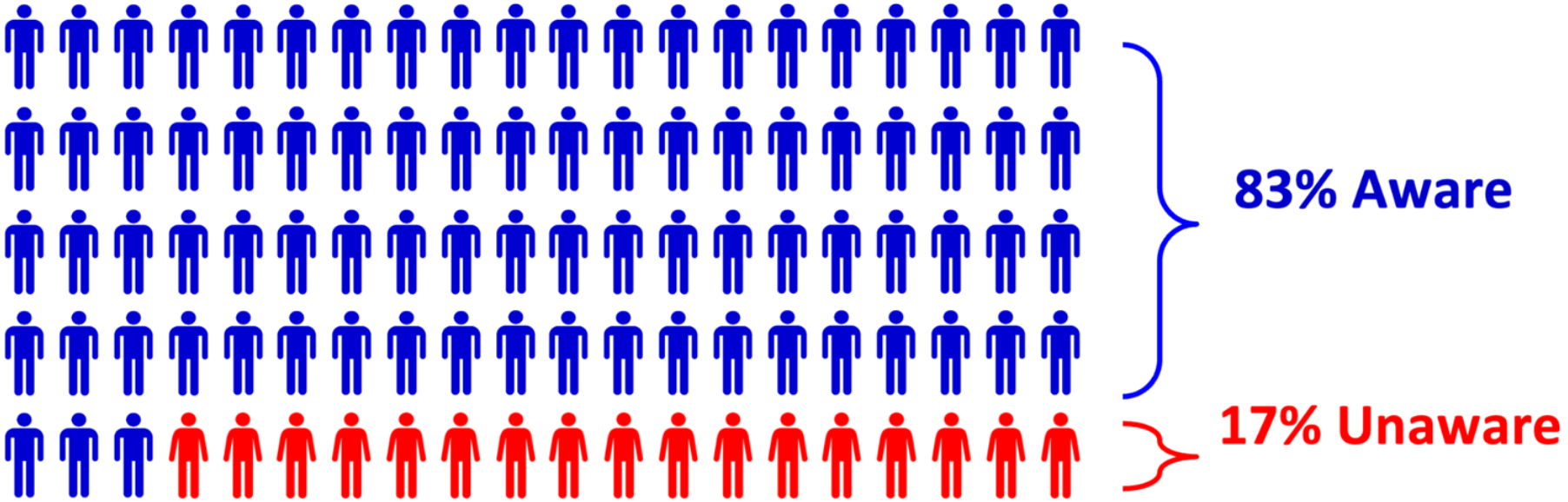
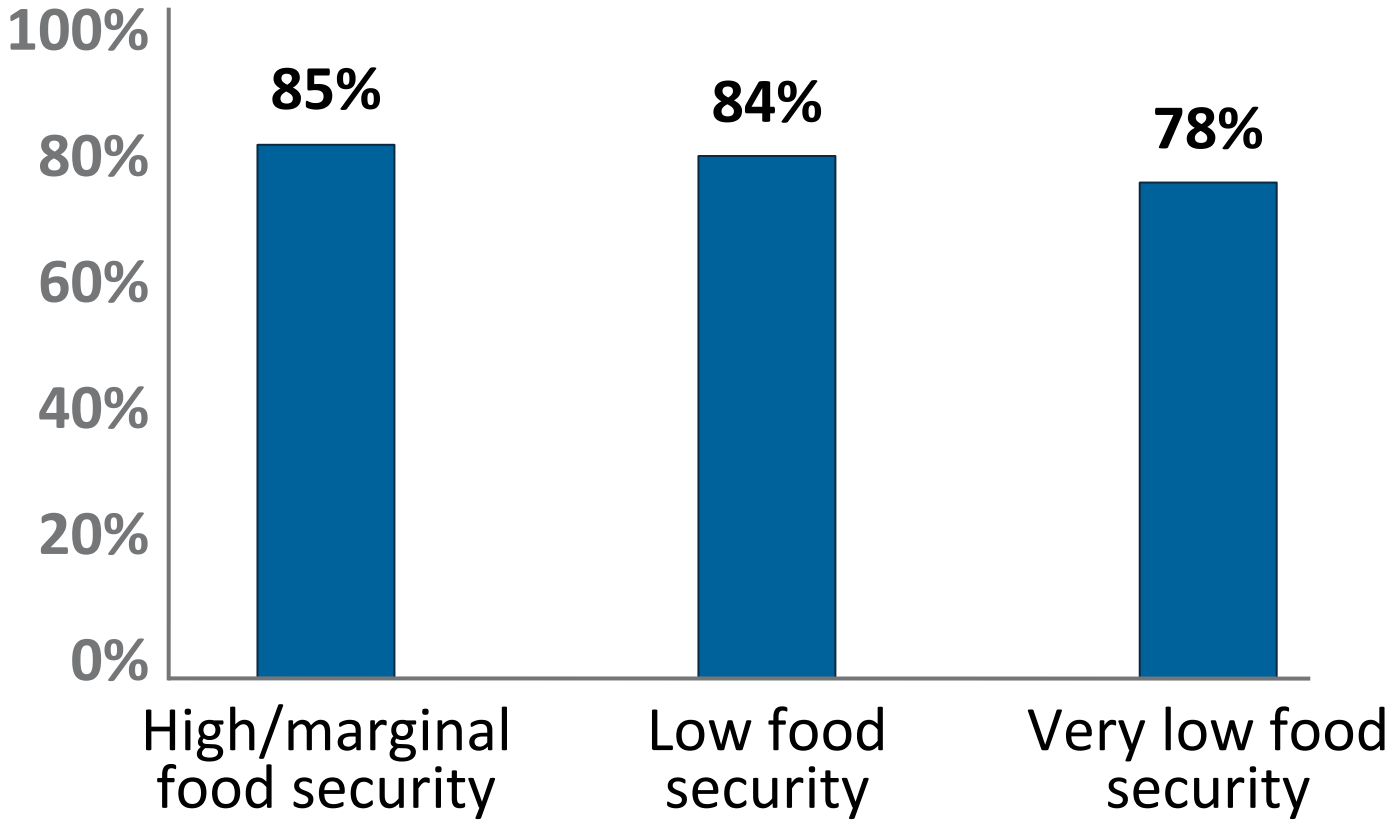
# “Have you ever heard of the Triton Food Pantry?” (N= 370)




**4 in 5 students are aware of the TFP**

# Does awareness differ by food security status? (N= 348)




*Objective 1*

# Objective 2: Do students use the TFP, and if so, how often are they using it?

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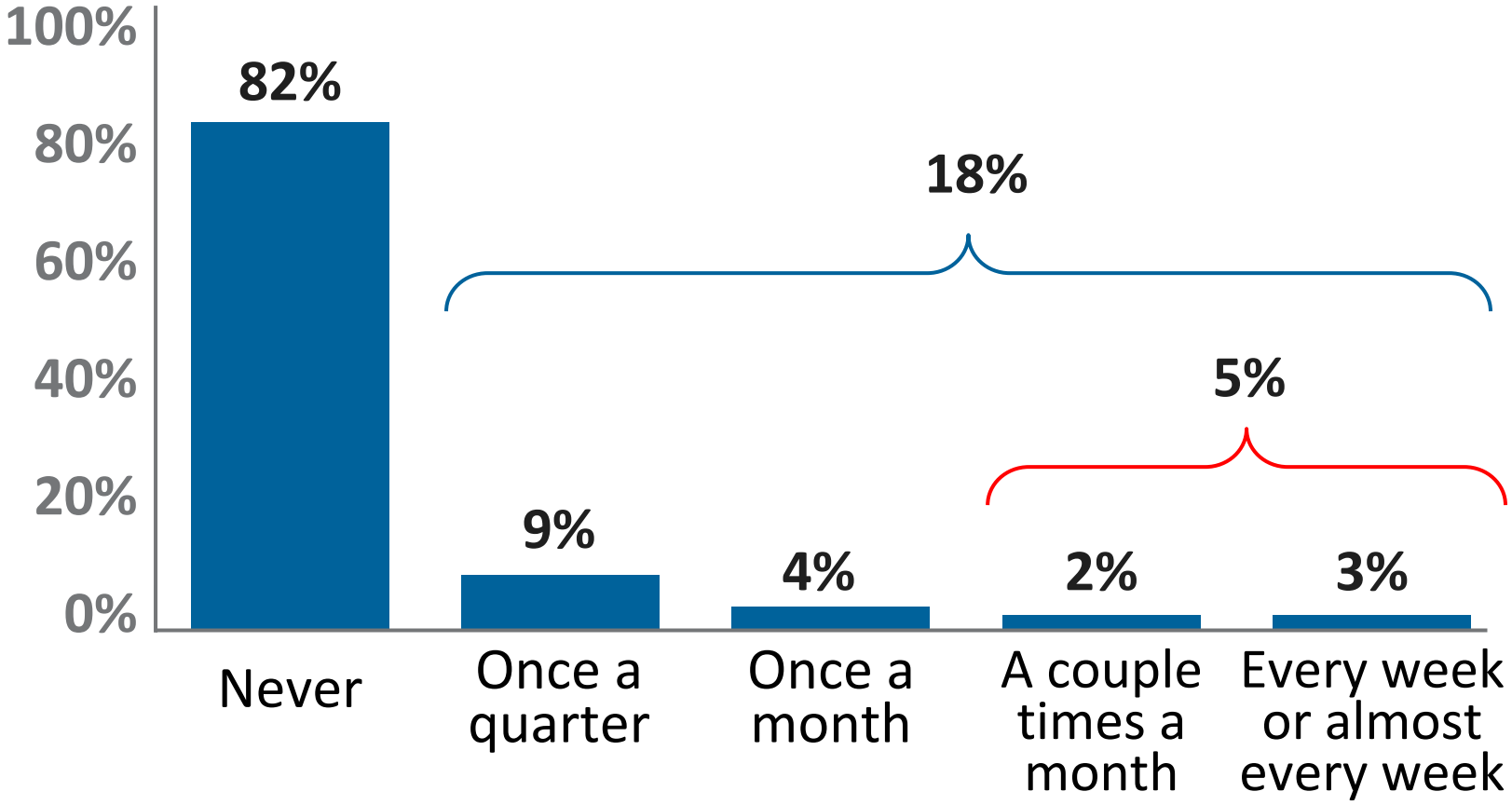
# How often have students used the TFP during the current 2023-24 school year? (N= 299)




**1 in 5 students have ever used the TFP**



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# Objective 3: What are the characteristics of the frequent users of the Triton Food Pantry?

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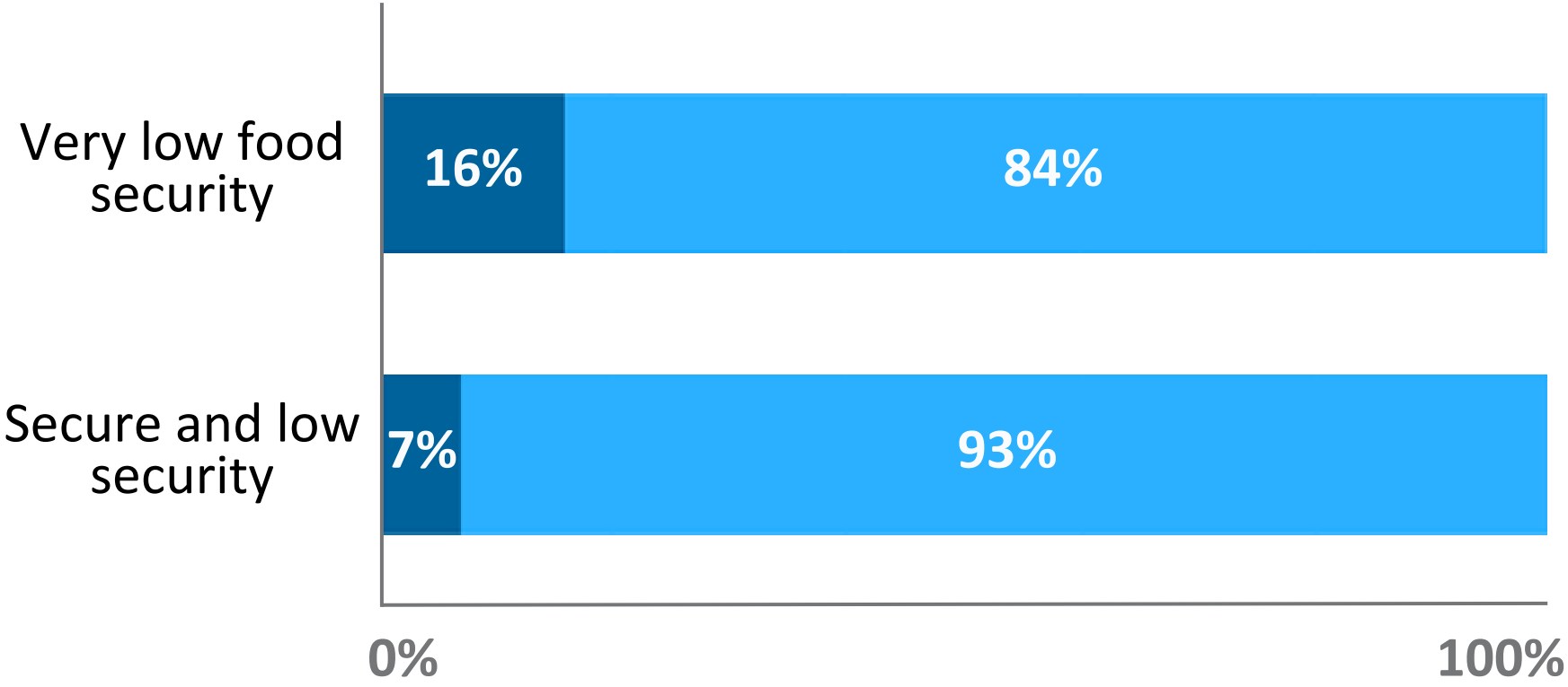
# Are very low food security students more likely to use the TFP > once a month? N= 299




*Students with very low food security were 2.3 times as likely to regularly use the TFP; p = 0.023*

# Objective 4: Among students who have used the TFP, what do they think of it?

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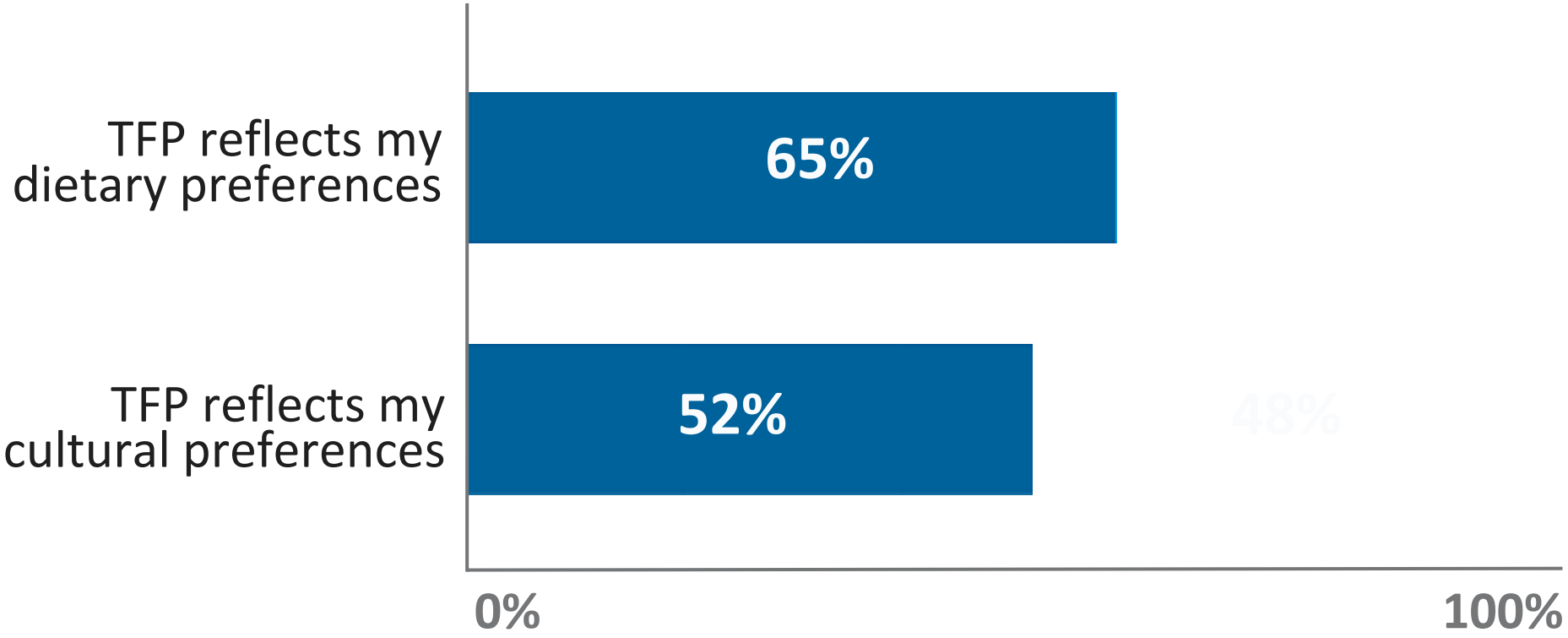
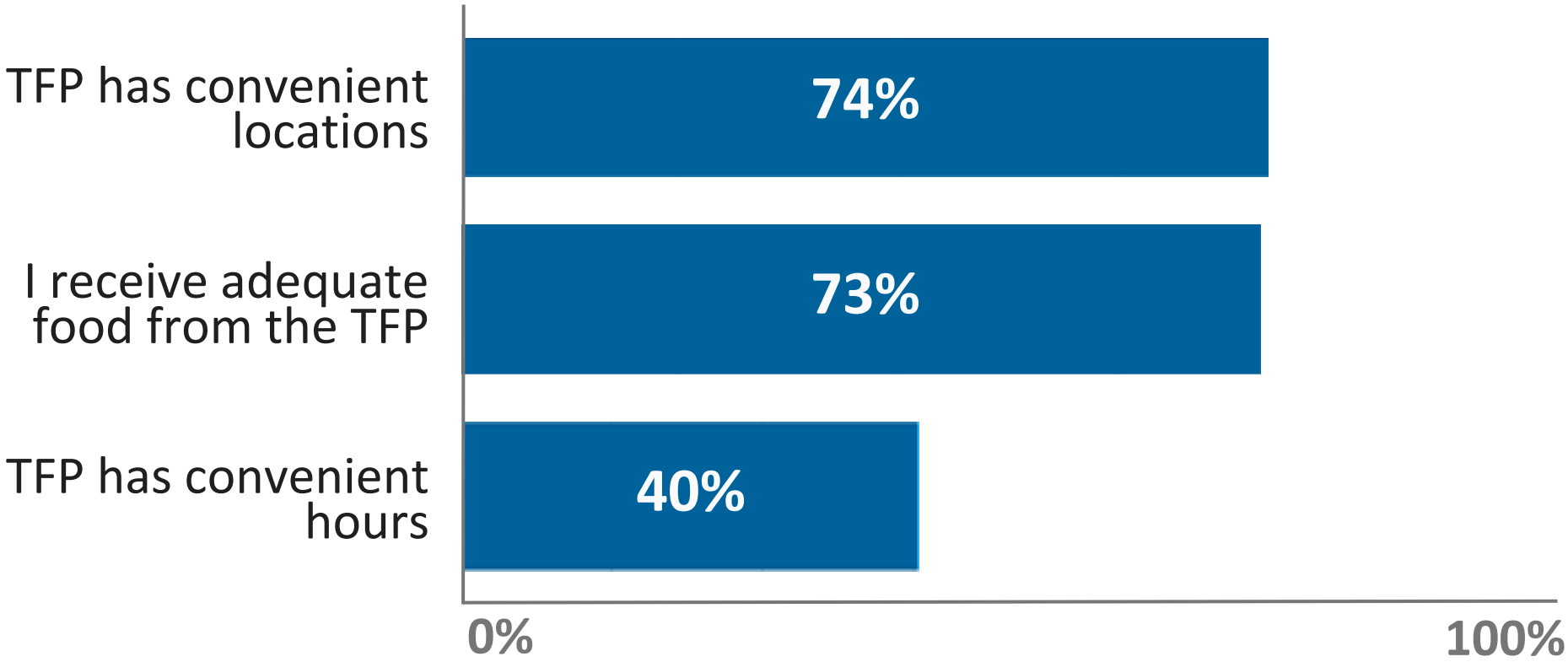
# Percent of students who strongly agree or agree with the following statements: (N= 52)

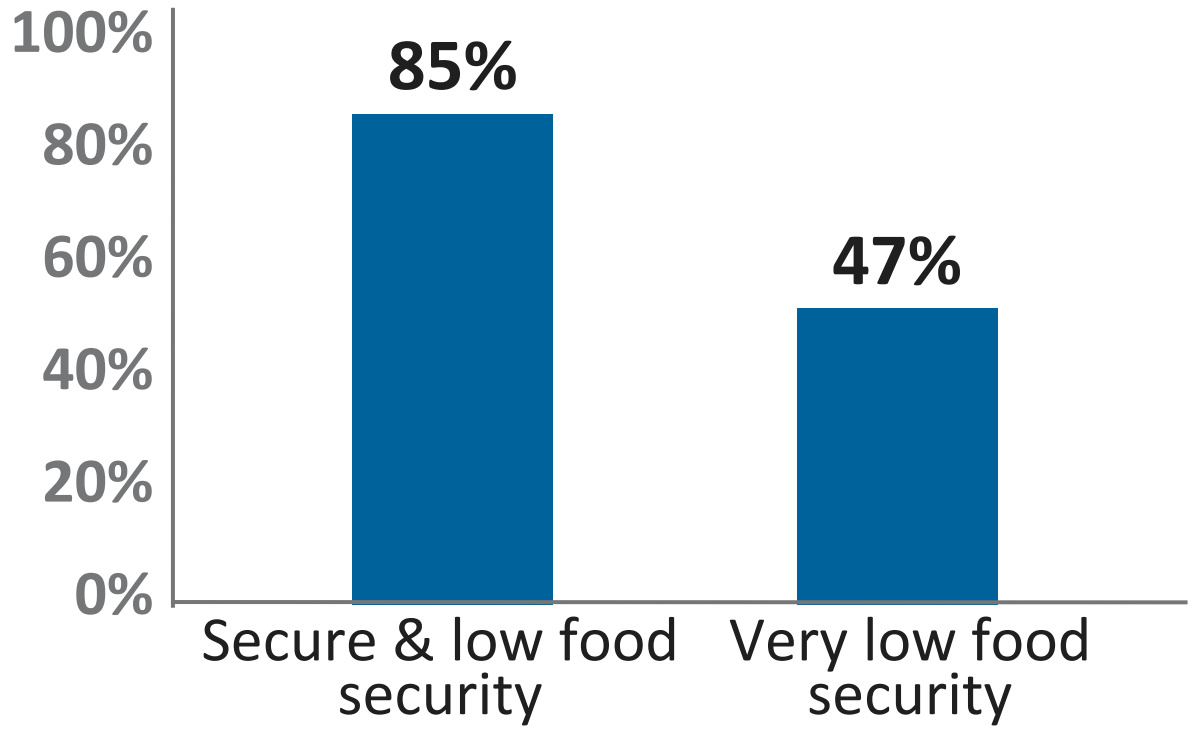



*Objective 3*

# Percent of students who strongly agree or agree with the following statements: (N= 52)

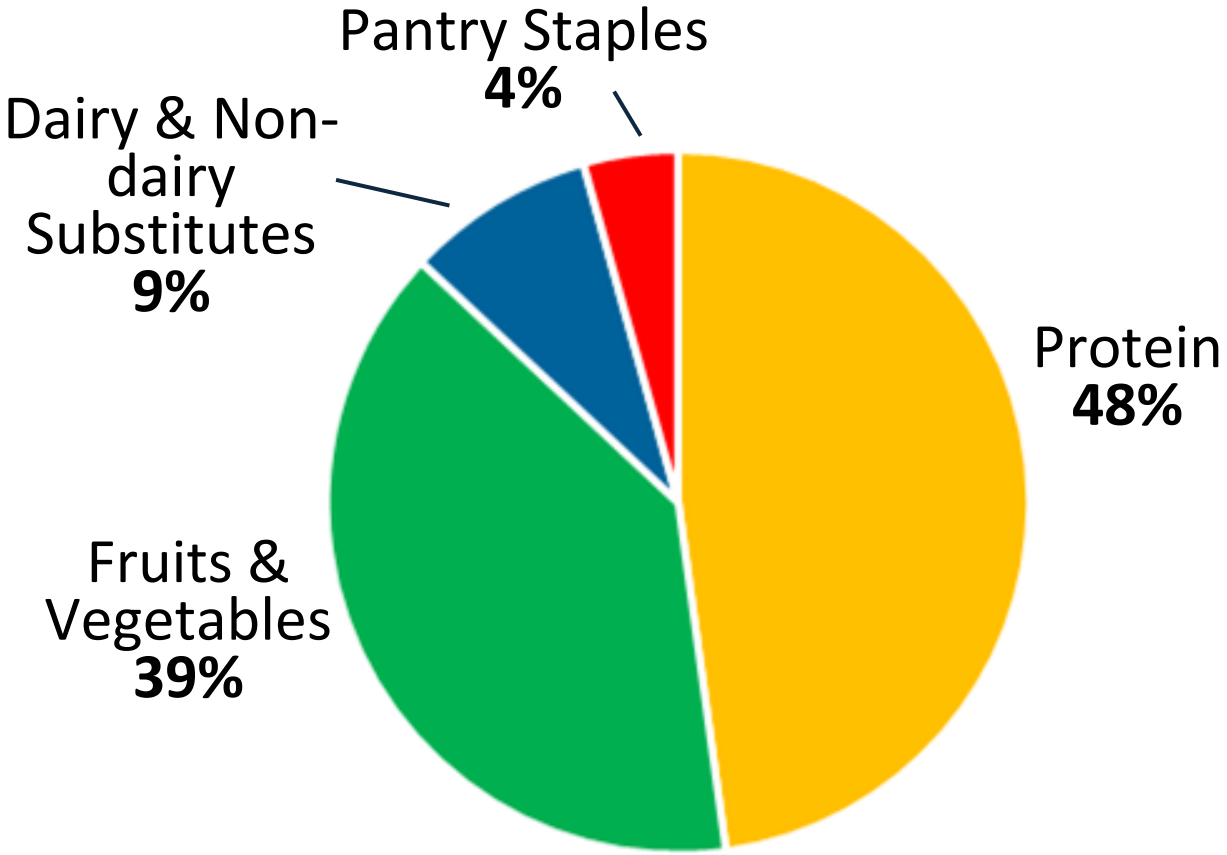


# Percent of students who strongly agree or agree that they receive adequate food from TFP based on food security status (N= 51)




*Students with very low food security were 0.6 times as likely to agree that they receive adequate food from TFP (p=0.007)*

# Items that students would MOST like to see more often at the TFP (N= 46)



# Objective 5: What are students' perceptions about the Triton Food Pantry and its users, and does it differ between food secure and insecure students?

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# Perceptions of All Users

# Perceptions by Food Security Status

## *Food Secure*

## *Food Insecure*

*Objective 5*

# Conclusions

- TFP awareness is high, but usage is low.
- Food security status is not associated with TFP awareness.
- Regular use is 2.3 times higher among VLFS students, but does not exceed 20%.
- More than half of VLFS students feel that they are not receiving adequate food from the TFP.
- Students would like to see more culturally representative foods and convenient hours.
- Students would like to see protein foods more often.
- All students have similar positive perceptions of the TFP.

# Recommendations

- Outreach
  - Use alternative channels to promote use (i.e. RAs, OLs…)
  - Notifications of approximate stock status
  - Target very low food secure students
- Understand the needs of TFP frequent users to increase awareness and use by VLFS students
  - Survey to meet cultural preferences
  - Allocate funds for protein foods and fruits/vegetables
- Increase accessibility
  - Simplify website
  - Increase TFP hours

# Thank You!

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STAR presents

# Food Recovery Network

Shria Bulusu, Tomi Oginni, Amy Trinh, Rachel Kitay

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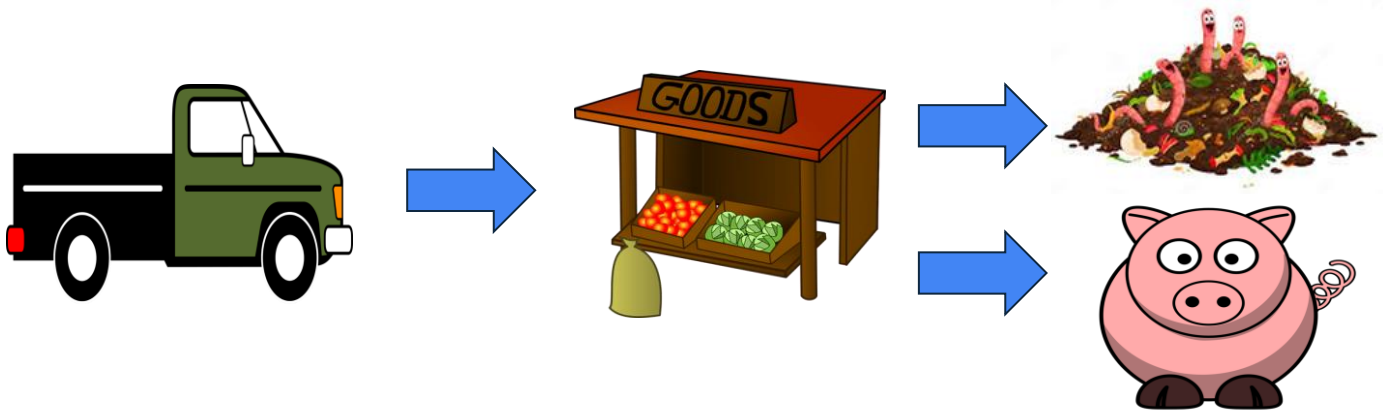
# Food Recovery Network

- National organization with chapters across various universities
- UCSD chapter founded in 2016
- Focuses on eliminating food waste locally while serving as a supplementary access point for nutrition

# How it works

- Community Partners: HDH dining halls and markets, Target @ UCSD, local retailers and local farmers' markets
- Recovered up to 15,000 lbs of food per quarter
- Unused food diverted through San Diego Food Bank, Feeding San Diego, and local farms

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# Student awareness and perceptions

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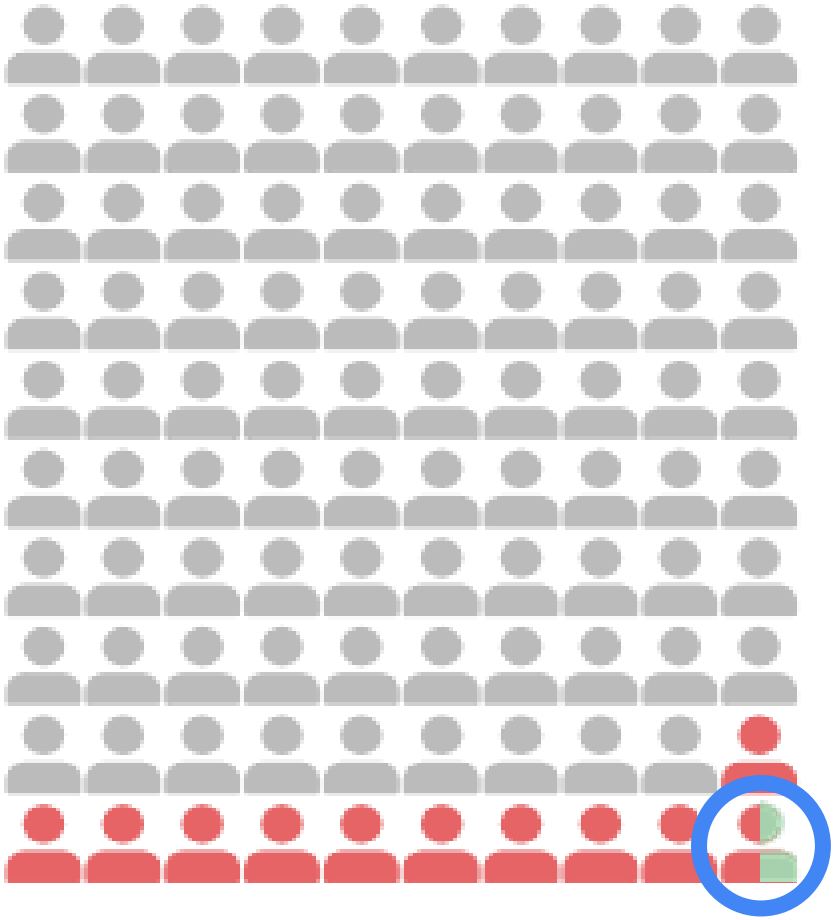
# Awareness of the FRN (n=361)



- Only 11% of respondents were aware of the FRN
- Only 5% of those who were aware were using it (0.5% of total respondents)
- Many, however, may be using the FRN unknowingly due to some distributions being hosted at the Hub

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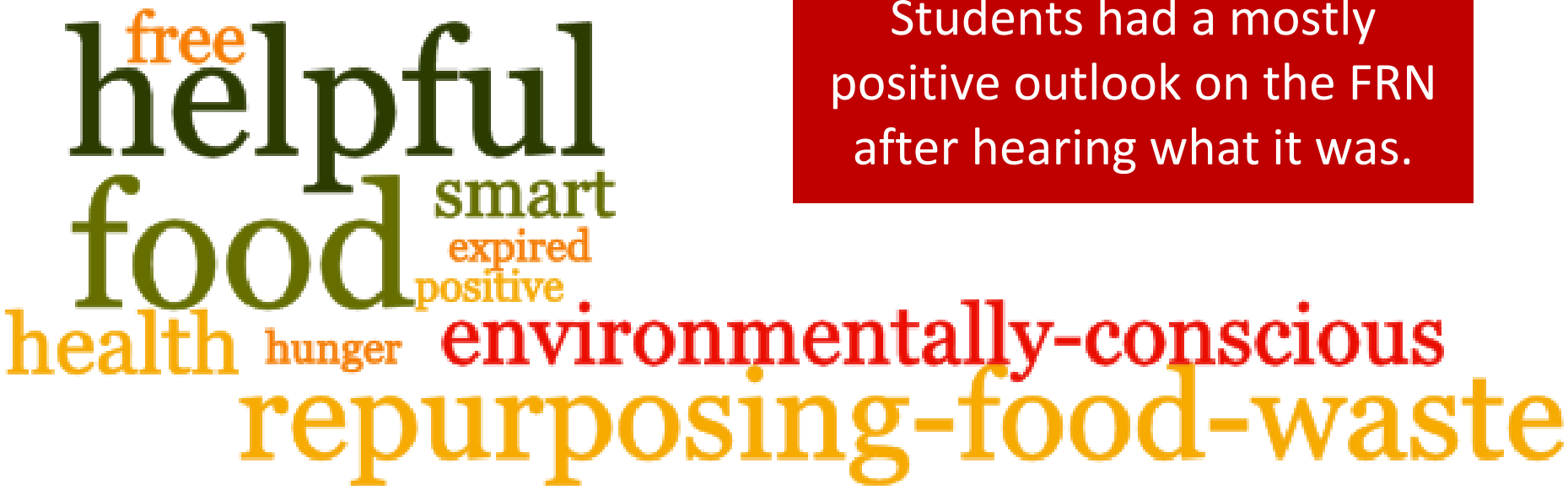
# Student Perceptions of the FRN

**List three words that come to mind when you hear about food recovery.**




Students had a mostly positive outlook on the FRN after hearing what it was.

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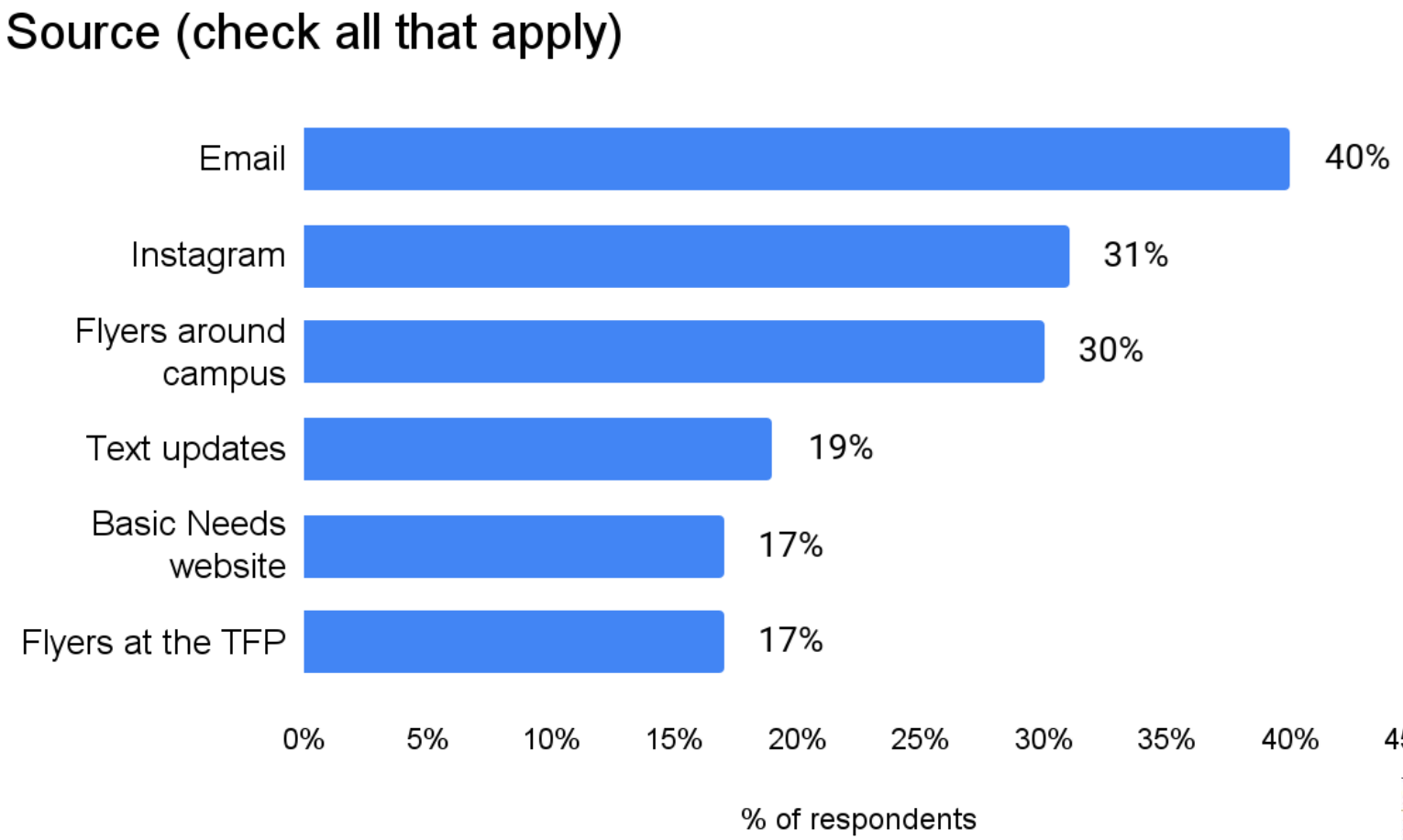
# Communication preferences

# Student communication preferences (n=370)

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# Conclusions

- Only 11% of respondents knew of the FRN with even fewer reporting use of the service
- Students have positive outlooks of the FRN but are generally unaware of its existence

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# Food Recovery Network - Recommendations

- Appropriate branding of the FRN will assist in understanding the effectiveness of the program

Therefore:

- Increase outreach through email, Instagram, and flyers around campus
- Make students aware of the times and locations of food distributions and the types of food available

# Thank you!

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# Safety-Net Programs and Dining Dollars

**Fantastic Five**

Gianina Fan, Sixuan Li, Melanie Lopez, Joseph Sadiki, Daphne Serrano

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# Safety-net Programs

# Background: Food safety-net programs

- CalFresh provides assistance to many food-insecure students but does not cover students who:
  - Face food emergencies
  - Are not US citizens (e.g., DACA, international)
  - Do not meet CalFresh income threshold or other requirements
- UCSD has several alternative safety-net resources
  - Emergency grocery gift cards
  - Emergency Triton Cash
  - iTable for international students
  - Yes Food for DACA students

# Objective 1: Are students aware of the safety net programs at UCSD?

# Are students aware of the safety-net programs at UCSD? (N=370)

| Program | Aware, % |
|---|---|
| Emergency Triton Cash | 11% |
| Emergency grocery gift cards | 8% |
| Yes Food program | 4% |
| iTable program | 3% |
| Any program | 20% |

**Only 1 in 5 students had heard of ANY of these programs**

# Are students aware of the safety-net programs at UCSD? (N=370)

| Program | Aware, % |
|---|---|
| Emergency Triton Cash | 11% |
| Emergency grocery gift cards | 8% |
| Yes Food program | 4% |
| iTable program | 3% |
| Any program | 20% |

**Only 1 in 5 students had heard of ANY of these programs**

# Objective 2: Have students used any of these programs?

# Have students used any of these programs? (N =370)

| Program | Aware, % | Used, % |
|---|---|---|
| Emergency Triton Cash | 11% | 1% |
| Emergency grocery gift cards | 8% | 1% |
| Yes Food program | 4% | 0% |
| iTable program | 3% | 1% |
| Any program | 20% | 3% |

**Only 1 in 30 students had used ANY of these programs**

# Dining Dollars

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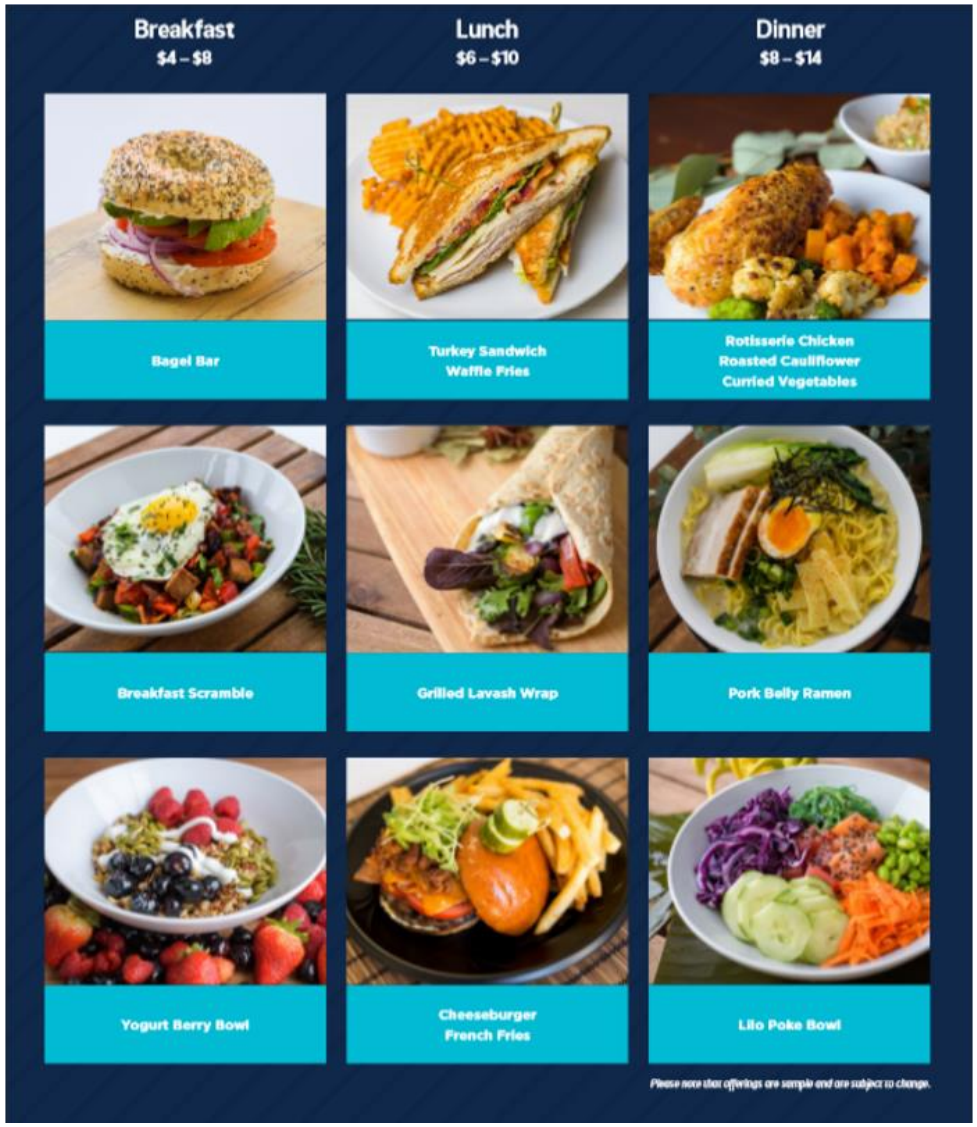
# Dining plans at other California universities

- Meal swipes
  - Allocated number of swipes in a given period of time: per week/quarter/semester
  - Comparable to a debit card with a declining balance
- Swipe in for a given meal
  - Access to all-you-can-eat buffet
  - Must eat all food in the dining hall
    - To-go meals are prohibited
- Menu typically not released beforehand

# HDH Dining Dollar Program

- No meal swipes; Dining Dollars associated with a real monetary value: $1 Dining Dollar = $1 USD
- A la carte meal and/or grocery purchase in 14 campus dining halls and markets
- Campus residents must purchase annual dining plan
  - Gold Plan (3 meals/day, 5 days a week)
  - Blue Plan (2 meals/day, 5 days a week)
  - Triton Plan (1 meal/day, 5 days a week)
- Designed for flexibility and choice; assumes students find other sources for remaining meals
- Meals covered by plans are only estimates; assumed $26/day x 5 days with Gold Plan and $16/day x 5 days with Blue Plan

# HDH Dining Dollar Program




- Cost of individual entrées: $4-$14
- Estimate for three meals/day (entrée only): $18-$32
- Students often spend more: purchasing sides, extra protein, add-ons, beverages, dessert
- No discounted special of the day

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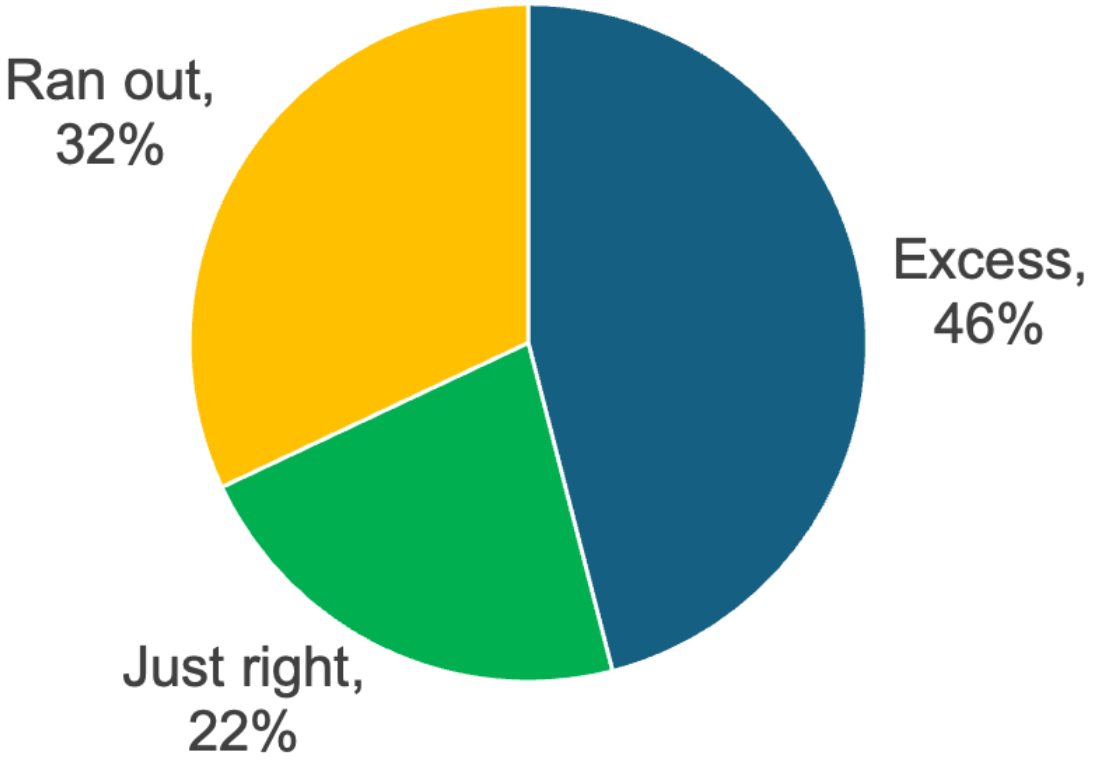
# Objective 3: To what extent do dining dollars cover the suggested number of weekly meals, and how do students pay for other meals?

# Dining Dollar status at end of most recent year on campus (N = 139)



# Where do students obtain additional meals? (N=159)

**Bought food/groceries with my own money or money that my family gave me**

**67%**

**Friends/family provided me with meals/groceries**

**31%**

**Bought food/groceries using CalFresh benefits**

**29%**

**Used Triton Cash/bought more Dining Dollars**

**28%**

**Food from Food Pantry/Food Recovery Network**

**6%**

**Emergency grocery gift cards/iTable/Yes Food**

**2%**

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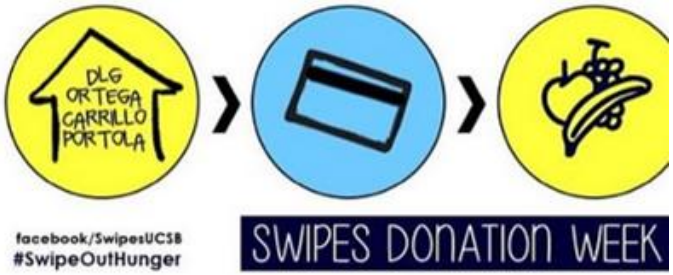
# Objective 4: Would UCSD students be willing to participate in a dining dollar donation program?

# Dining Dollar leftover & meal-swipes donations

- Leftover dollars useable for one additional quarter; 15% of any remaining value donated to Triton Food Pantry
- Other UC schools have donation programs for unused meal “swipes”




iCare

Meals to your Peers Using Excess Meal Plan Swipes.

**Meal Swipes Program**

Our core program! Basically, we let students donate their extra swipes at the end of the quarter to food-insecure students. These swipes would otherwise go to waste, so we encourage every student to donate.

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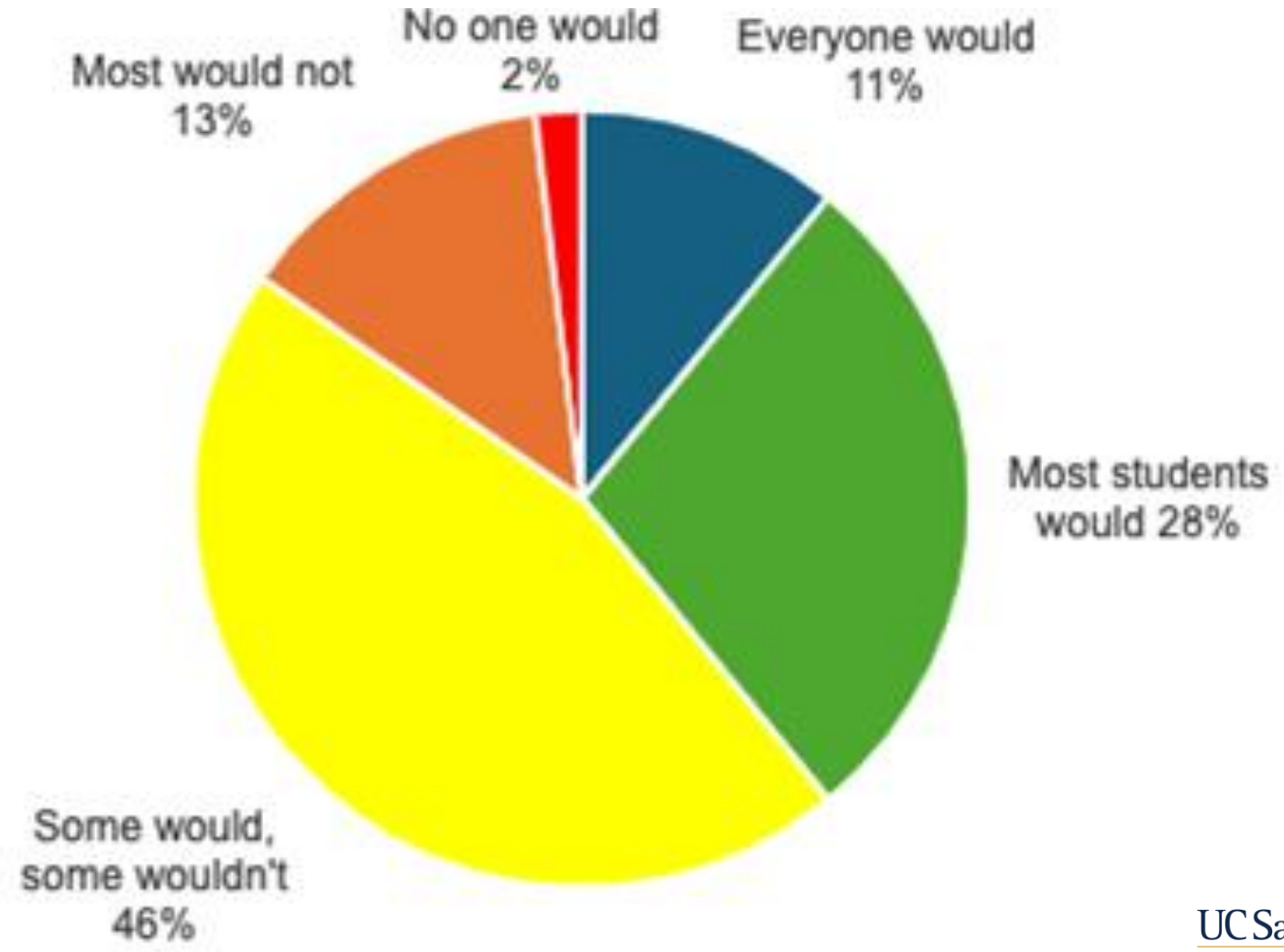
# Would UCSD students be willing to participate in a dining dollar donation program? (N=156)

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# Conclusion & Recommendations

# Conclusions

- Student awareness and use of food safety-net programs are low (20% and 3%, respectively)
- Almost a third of students ran out of dining dollars before the end of the year, nearly half had excess dining dollars
- Many students would be willing to donate unused Dining Dollars to students in need

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# Conclusions

- Upcoming updates to HDH Dining Dollar Plan (Effective Fall 2024)
  - No expiration on Dining Dollars for students who remain enrolled on a dining plan
  - Increased Triton Cash with all dining plans
  - New plans:
    - Commuter Plan (Triton Cash > Dining Dollars)
    - Yellow Plan
    - Trident Plan

# Recommendations

- Publicize these safety-net programs to students
- Obtain more financial support to expand accessibility and strengthen programs
- Improve overall transparency with students regarding unused Dining Dollars
- Consider implementing a Dining Dollar donations program at UCSD to provide relief for campus residents facing food insecurity
- Monitor ongoing survey of food insecurity and Dining Dollar status among on-campus students

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# Triton Cash

- Applicable to both dining halls/markets, *and* on-campus (unaffiliated with UCSD) restaurants
- Restaurants include:
  - All restaurants in Price Center (Burger King, Panda Express, etc.)
  - Others such as Blue Bowl, Shake Smart
- $50-$100 Triton Cash included in Blue and Gold Dining Dollar plans
- Can also be used in UCSD Bookstore