

# Hungry for Help: The Impact of Food Insecurity on Academic Success at UCSD

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## Introduction

- Food insecurity, defined as uncertain or limited access to nutritionally adequate and safe food and the inability to access such foods in a safe and socially acceptable way (USDA)
- Food insecurity is common on college campuses, and is correlated with negative health and academic outcomes
- Study undertaken among UCSD public health students to:
  - Assess prevalence of food insecurity, including very low food security
  - Identify the demographic and financial risk factors associated with very low food security
  - Examine the association between very low food insecurity and academic performance

## Methods

- In February 2024, a Qualtrics survey on food insecurity and use of UCSD's food security safety net was administered to undergraduate public health students
- 6-item USDA questionnaire used to classify students' food security
  - High/Marginal Food Security: nutritional needs adequately met
  - Food Insecurity: access to nutritional needs is limited
    - Low food security: reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet.
    - **Very low food security: disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake**
- Response rate: 75% (366/486)
- EpiInfo 7.2.6 used to calculate frequencies, prevalence rate ratios (PRR), and p-values for the relationships between demographic and financial risk factors and between food security status and academic outcomes

## Results

- 45% of respondents meet the USDA criteria for low food insecurity, and 22% of respondents met the criteria for very low food security
- **Demographic risk factors associated with very low food security:**
  - First generation status (PRR=1.9, p=0.002)
  - Latino/Chicano identity (PRR=1.7, p=0.008)
  - On-campus residence (PRR=1.1, p=0.3) or graduation year (p=0.98) had no significant impact on VLFS status
- **Financial risk factors associated with very low food security:**
  - Low family income level (PRR: 1.8, p=0.002)
  - Financial aid reception (PRR=2.9, p=0.00006)
  - Having problems making ends meet "most or every month" (PRR=4.9, p=10<sup>-7</sup>)
  - Worried "all the time" about finances and debt (PRR=2.7, p=0.0000002)
- **Students with very low food security were 2.6 times more likely to have GPAs < 3.5 (p=0.00008)**

## Conclusions & Recommendations

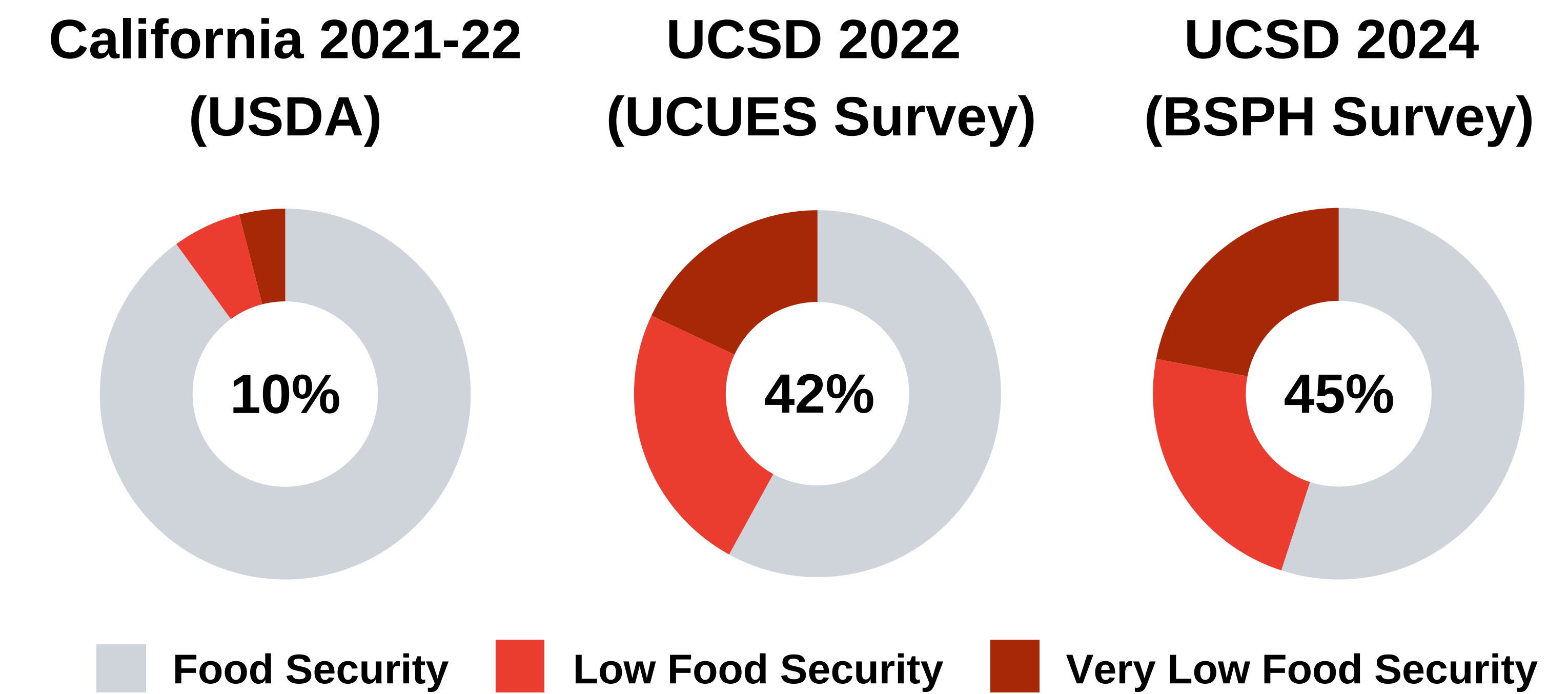
- Rates of very low food security are high among UCSD students, and food insecurity rates are 4.2 times higher than the state average
- First-generation status and Latino/Chicano identity, low family income, and financial difficulties were significantly associated with very low food security
- Students with very low food security were at increased risk for poor academic performance
- Adequate financial aid is needed to meet rising costs of attending UCSD
- Basic needs programs and safety nets at UCSD should be strengthened to improve food security and facilitate better academic performance
- Monitoring of food insecurity rates should be ongoing and broadened in scope



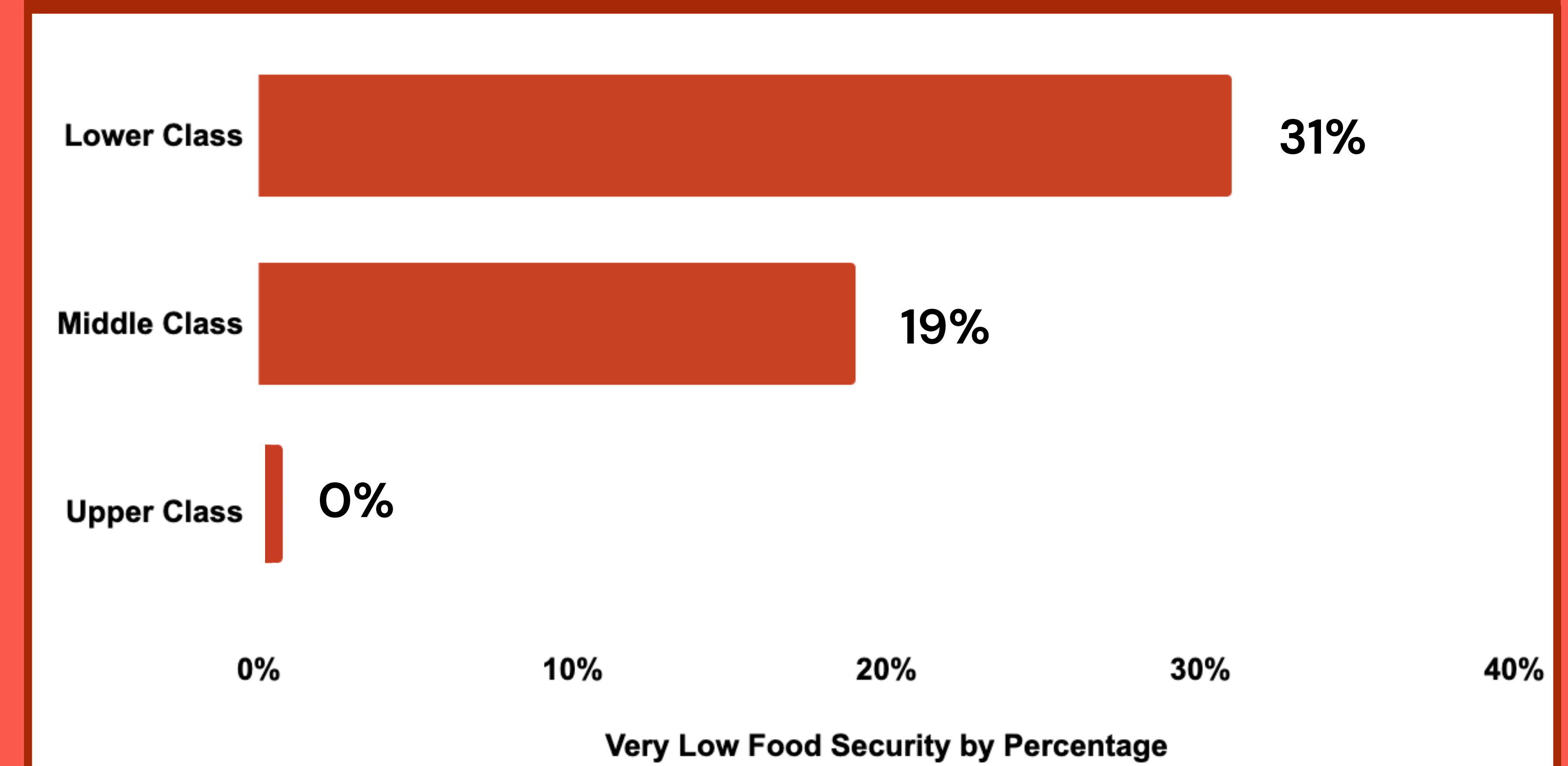
One in five UCSD students faces very low food security, which is associated with a 2.6-fold risk of poorer GPA



## Rates of Food Insecurity



## Very Low Food Security by Family Income (n=348)



## GPA Distribution by Food Security Status (n=344)

