

Slipping Through the Cracks: Safety-Net Programs and Dining Dollars at UCSD

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Introduction

- 40% of both on- and off-campus students at UCSD meet the USDA definition of food insecurity and report that they don't have money to buy food
- Students who do not qualify for CalFresh must rely on other food safety-net programs, including emergency gift cards and Triton Cash, iTable, and Yes Food
- Most UC campuses have all-you-can-eat dining halls and have established meal swipe donation programs as an additional safety net for on-campus students
- UCSD has a different model in which students purchase annual Dining Dollar plans covering 10-15 à la carte meals/week at campus restaurants; students expected to cover other meals
- No refunds for leftover Dining Dollars; 15% of value donated to Triton Food Pantry
- Survey conducted to examine:
 - a. Knowledge and use of UCSD's alternative safety-net programs
 - b. Dining Dollar status at end of school year and attitudes toward establishing a Dining Dollar donation program at UCSD

Methods

- Qualtrics survey with a food safety-net module administered in February 2024, UCSD's entry-level and capstone public health course students
- Questionnaire included awareness and use of emergency grocery gift cards, emergency Triton Cash, iTable for international students, and Yes Food for DACA students; also assessed Dining Dollar status at end of most recent year on campus and willingness of students to donate excess Dining Dollars
- EpiInfo 7.2.6 used for data analysis
- Response rate was 75% (366/486)

Results

- 20% of students aware of at least one program, most commonly emergency Triton Cash (11%) and emergency grocery gift cards (8%), but only 3% had used any of these programs
- 46% of students had excess Dining Dollars at end of school year, while 32% ran out
- 39% of students believed that all or many of their peers would be willing to donate excess Dining Dollars to students in need, 46% believed they might or might not, and 15% believed they probably would or definitely would not

Conclusions

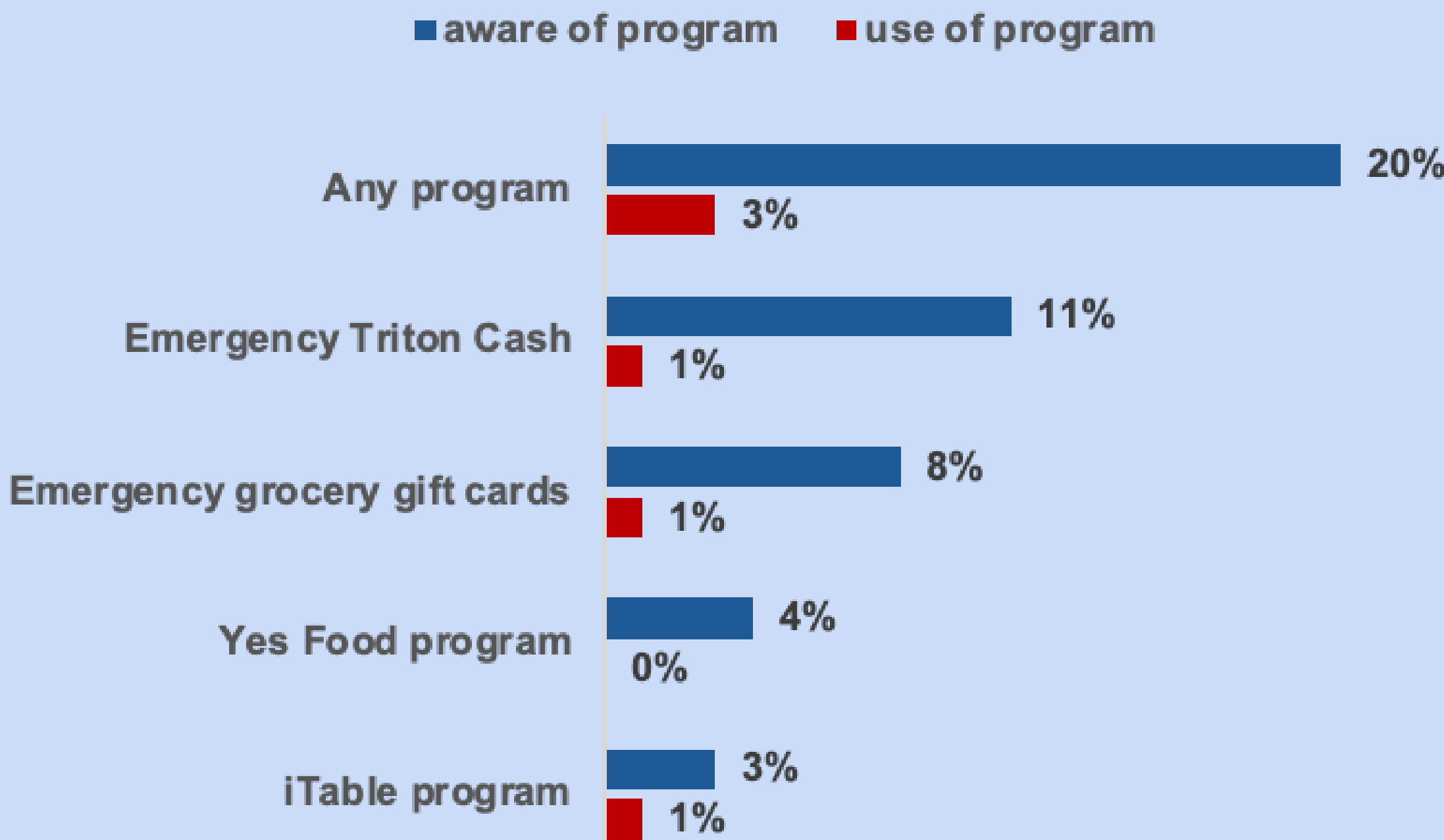
- Student awareness of food safety-net programs is low, and few had taken advantage of any of these programs
- Many students have excess Dining Dollars and are willing to donate them, suggesting that UCSD should explore setting up a Dining Dollar donation program to help students in need
- Further monitoring of food insecurity, Dining Dollar status, and use of safety-net programs among UCSD students is warranted

Student awareness of food safety-net programs is low, and few have taken advantage of any of these programs

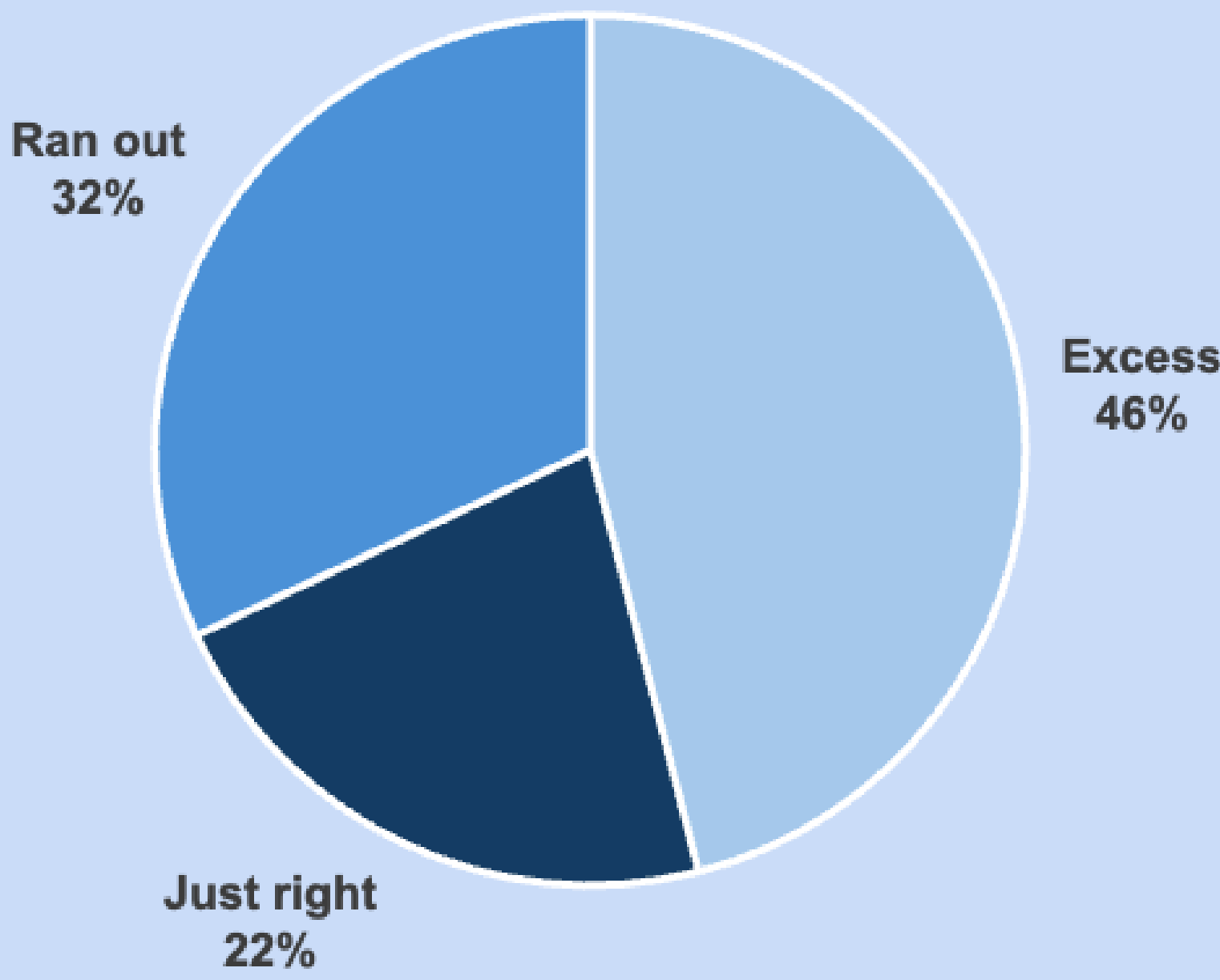
Students have excess Dining Dollars and would be willing to donate them to others in need



Student Awareness vs. Use of Safety-Net Programs (N = 366)



Dining Dollar Status at End of Most Recent Year on Campus (N = 139)



Perceived Peer Willingness to Participate in Dining Dollar Donation Program (N = 156)

