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College Students Succeed with Basic Needs

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Abstract

The Basic Needs Initiative at CSUMB advocates for overall wellness security and offers six programs to support their mission. Students facing food insecurity experienced lack of stability, mental health issues from past trauma, and lack of college readiness. Some consequences are poor health, worsen mental health and low academic standing. Prior to the shelter-in-place, Basic Needs offered food pantries, in-person CalFresh assistance and events which offered students hot foods. The quarantine caused a decrease in the services within Basic Needs while there was an increase of need within the student body. The internet barrier affected the services the organization offered which made it difficult for students to participate. My capstone project focused on increasing the social media content by sharing useful resources at least five times a week. About 41% of CalFresh applications in 2020 were submitted during the eight weeks of the project. Overall there was a 21% increase of followers with an average of one new follower per post throughout August 31st and November 6th.

Keywords: college students, food insecurity, resources, social media, wellness security

Agency & Communities Served

Increase in food insecurities at college campuses in California caused politicians to advocate for change. In 2017, the California Senate passed an amendment to Senate Bill 85 which granted funding for community college, California State University(CSU) and University of California(UC) to plan, implement, and analyze ways to incorporate basic needs resources for students (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review, 2017). The CSU Chancellor's Office awarded funding to campuses through the "Hunger-Free Campus Designation" funding based on submission of proposals. Campuses focused on informing how they would address students' basic needs, food insecurities and housing displacement (California State University, 2017).

California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB) applied for the grant through the office of Dean of Students, specifically under the Care Team. With the voices of students and funding, CSUMB brought Basic Needs Initiative (Basic Needs) to campus. There are two professional staff members, two student assistants, and two interns working for Basic Needs. The professional staff positions are a full-time, Basic Needs Coordinator and a full-time, Care Manager. Basic Needs Student Assistants can work up to 20 hours per week and Basic Needs Intern must complete at least 60 hours per semester. The Basic Needs Initiative supports the following programs: Cooking with CSUMB, Otter Groceries, CalFresh, Otter Snacks, weekly office hour and manages the Emergency Fund (California State University Monterey Bay, 2020). Cooking with CSUMB is new virtual weekly series which will demonstrate easy, affordable meals tailored specifically for college students. Otter Groceries grants up to $200 per student, per academic year worth of groceries. Students can opt in receiving $100 per semester or awarded once if needed. CalFresh Food is another name of a federally funded Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in California. CalFresh at higher education institutions allow for

low-income students participating in educational support services (e.g. EAOP, TRIO, and

Guardian Scholars), receiving Cal Grant A or B, participating in work study or working an

average of 80 hours per month, and/or a student with children. The Otter Snacks Map highlights

sites on campus or near campus where students can access fresh fruits and vegetables. During

Basic Needs weekly office hours students are able to join a Zoom meeting and speak with a

Student Assistant on the programs and services offered by Basic Needs. Lastly, the Emergency

Fund has served as a support for students experiencing catastrophic events. The overall goal of

Basic Needs program is to support students so their academics aren't being jeopardized due to

lack of basic needs.

Per the *CSU Study of Student Basic Needs (Phase 2)* conducted in 2016, 41.6% of CSU

students experienced food insecurity (California State University, 2018b). CSUMB also

conducted a survey in 2016 which reflected that 50.1% of students faced food insecurity. The

studies showed that CSUMB students' food insecurity was at higher rate than the average CSU

student.

Problem Description

Students facing food insecurities are less likely to excel in higher education. Chapin Hall

at the University of Chicago conducted interviews on 215 youth aged 13 to 25 in 5 counties in

the United States of America with 86 percent 18 to 21 years-old and 33.5 percent 22 to 25 years

old (Samuels, et al., 2019). About 14 of the students attended community college and six

attended a 4-year university. Nearly half of the youth aged 16-24, were considered "disconnected

youth" as they weren't attending school nor working. The *Study of Student Basic Needs*

published in 2018 by California State University, shared that previous research with college

students showed that between 21% and 52% experienced food insecurity. About 40% of CSU students reported they experienced low and very low food insecurity.

Contributing Factors

Three contributing factors to the issue of students' food insecurity are lack of stability, mental health issues stemmed from past trauma and lack of college readiness.

Over 40% of youth stated their family discriminated and stigmatized them due to their sexuality (Chapin Hall at University of Chicago, 2019). Nearly 80% of this youth group migrated in and out of hometowns but never traveled outside of home state. These youths were not experiencing homelessness for the first time, it was found that 93% of the group never experienced stability. Not knowing where one will be able to sleep, who one will be staying with or what is happening may cause high stress levels which can be masked through substance abuse.

Family-based trauma affected the mental health of these young adults. About 30% of youth reported they were experiencing homelessness due to their guardians' cycles of physical abuse/neglect/violence. These individuals not only had to worry about what was happening directly to them but added stressors of seeing people they loved hurt themselves and other along the way.

The lack of stability at home negatively affects students who are attending higher education. These students are more inclined to struggle academically, difficulty filling our applications (FAFSA, Admissions, etc.), and unable to balance financial responsibilities of school and life (United States Government Accountability Office, 2016). Homeless and foster youth have limited knowledge on resources available which hinders their opportunity of attending a higher education institution.

Consequences

Three consequences reflected from the problem are poor health, worsened mental health and low grades. Studies within adults show that food insecurity is often associated with other health issues such as diabetes, depression, decreased nutrient intake, and poor self-rated health status (Freudenberg, Goldrick-Rab, Poppendieck, 2019). Food insecurity may lead to obesity since there is consumption of lower-cost, calorie-dense foods. The relationship between health and food insecurity shows that it can be both a cause and consequence of food insecurity.

Students with food insecurity were asked how many out of 30 days they experienced poor health days, poor mental health days, and inactive days. Those facing very low food insecurity averaged about six days of poor health, 14.5 days of poor mental health and seven inactive days (California State University, 2018a). Student often had bad mental health days which caused them to work less hours. They were forced to decide which expenses are most important often resulting with them not eating (Meza, Altman, Martinez, Leung, 2018). A student from the study mentioned the embarrassment she felt when roommates would invite out to eat and she didn't have the money. Her roommates would comment as if she were cheap but she could not afford it.

About 60% of the students experiencing food insecurity missed more school and work due to the frustration of mental health concerns (Meza, Altman, Martinez, Leung, 2018). Missing class leads to less understanding of material and more likely for students to fail classes. Students facing these insecurities obtained a lower GPA compared to those housed and high food security. Out of 4.0 GPA system, the very low food security population reached 3.0 high food security reached highest of 3.3. Studies show that students may also have delayed graduations or more likely to dropout than food-secure students (Freudenberg, Goldrick-Rab, Poppendieck, 2019).
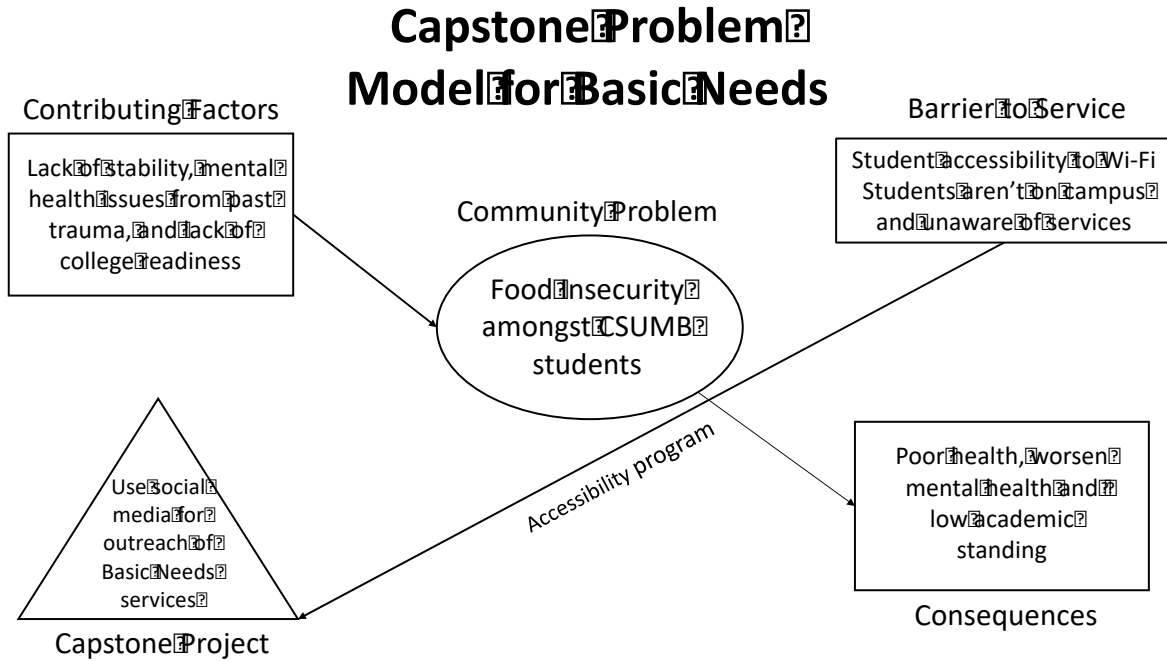
Students were angry with their institution because they felt that their campus didn't do enough for students facing food insecurities.

Barriers to Service

A current barrier is the lack of social media knowledge within Basic Needs faculty. A past CHHS intern was the student who created their only social media account, Twitter. They Twitter account was essentially created for CalFresh outreach. When the shelter-in-place was announced Basic Needs realized they would need to get creative on how to assistance student's remotely. Through the process, the team realized that they would not be able to reach a large audience due to lack of student engagement. Currently, Basic Needs is only able to assist with CalFresh and Unemployment applications through Google Voice Number and Zoom.

An unforeseen barrier to service is the accessibility to Wi-Fi. Prior to COVID-19 shelter-in-place all CSUMB students could use campus computers and internet to complete course assignments, studying and stability. The closure of campus led to Basic Needs working remotely. With all programs being online it means that only those students with internet access can attend events, complete forms, and apply for emergency fund. Basic Needs advocated for a delegated space on-campus for students to obtain Wi-Fi and the campus agreed to open a parking lot. Opening the parking lot meant only students with vehicles could use this resource, leaving another vulnerable population without resource. Even with the parking lot opened for Wi-Fi it seems that students aren't using the resources. A Basic Needs Student Assistant oversees the front desk on Sundays and based on their feedback, they've never seen a student actively using the space on Sundays from 10AM to 6PM.

Problem Model

Capstone Problem
Model for Basic Needs

Contributing Factors

Barrier to Service

Lack of stability, mental
health issues from past
trauma, and lack of
college readiness

Community Problem

Student accessibility to Wi-Fi
Students aren't on campus
and unaware of services

Food Insecurity
amongst CSUMB
students

Poor health, worsen
mental health and
low academic
standing

Use social
media for
outreach of
Basic Needs
services

Accessibility program

Consequences

Capstone Project

Capstone Project Description and Justification

Capstone Project

Basic Needs at CSUMB offers a total of six programs which focus towards on assisting students secure their basic needs. For my capstone project I will focus on analyzing the participation of students in programs and engagement on social media platforms. My capstone will be to generate content from Basic Needs to share on social media platforms, both Twitter Instagram, and Facebook. We also plan to use social media to collaborate with other departments by sharing their events and recording Zoom meetings as events. The overall goal is to increase the social media presence for Basic Needs to better support students now and in the future.

Project Purpose

The capstone project will focus on program accessibility for students and how to increase student engagement. It was announced early in the semester that Spring 2021 would remain online increasing the risk of students lacking basic needs.

Whether students are commuting to campus, living on campus or attending school remotely, finding stability can be an issue. Basic Needs is a place for students to voice housing, food insecurity concerns, but also a place full of resources. Basic Needs isn't well-known throughout campus so I would like to research what is currently used to advertise Basic Needs. When the regulations for COVID19 begun, The Hub was forced to shut down, leaving hundreds of students without food and support. Students relied on services such as: Starbucks perishables, food vouchers, canned goods or CalFresh application support. Students moved into homes that may also be facing similar situations so the goal is that these social media accounts are used to inform students of food resources, housing opportunities, cooking demos, no matter where they are residing.

Project Justification

Nearly 75% of CSUMB receive financial aid assistance, which shows a large portion of students face some sort of financial distress and may lead to food and housing insecurities. Students have lost jobs which may not only cause financial distress but also emotional distress. Studies show that a student is more likely to purchase instant frozen meals when experiencing financial hardship (Harmon, et al., 2017). Students are required to shelter-in-place yet may not have knowledge on how to create an inexpensive healthy, balanced meal. A study by a professor at Allegheny College showed that students are unaware of what it takes to maintain a healthy diet. About 90% of her students expressed that the course helped understand food and culture but also ways to improve their life choices (Ozorak, 2013).

Project Implementation

I began by creating infographics that promoted Basic Needs services, CSUMB events, CalFresh updates and self-care tips which were all shared via Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. Infographics contained direct links to applications (if applicable), giveaway details, and step by step instructions so students could easily access resources. In collaboration with other departments such as, Associated Students, Otter Student Union, Transfer Student Center and Otter Cross Culture Center, Basic Needs staff created cooking demos, CalFresh application demos, and Q&A's via social media platforms and Zoom. The collaboration increased the outreach because the organizations mentioned earlier shared Basic Needs social media posts on their accounts. The social media engagement was a minimum of five posts per week even including reposts of departments posts.

Assessment Plan

The results will be measured based on the response rate and information gathered from a survey November 2nd at noon to November 11th at noon. The survey asks students for feedback on Basic Needs services. It has eight required questions: 1. How did you hear about Basic Needs services? 2. Which services did you use from Basic Needs? 3. How well did our services help you with food insecurity? 4. How well did our services help you with housing insecurity? 5. How well did our services help you with academic success? 6. How often did you use of services? 7. Which services best supported you? Why? 8. How can we improve the services? Optional: First Name, CSUMB Email. The optional question was for the chance to win a $25 Amazon Gift Card. The survey was made short and simple with the chance for students to elaborate if interested. The Instagram post insights were recorded from August 31, 2020 till November 6, 2020. The insights are based on each individual post and show how many new followers, how many website clicks and interactions from the post.

Expected Outcomes

The outcome of increasing social media presence means an increase knowledge of Basic Needs within the student body and increase of student engagement. We anticipate that our social media presence will grow by at least 30% on Instagram and an increase of at least 45% in CalFresh applications by November 6, 2020.

Project Results

The eight week social media implementation caused an increase in Basic Needs' social media presence. On October 7th Basic Needs implemented the Hootsuite software which made the social media postings consistent as content was uploaded simultaneously onto Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. It resulted that Facebook and Twitter received more traffic from organizations like Swipe Out Hunger and California State Universities. The Instagram insights
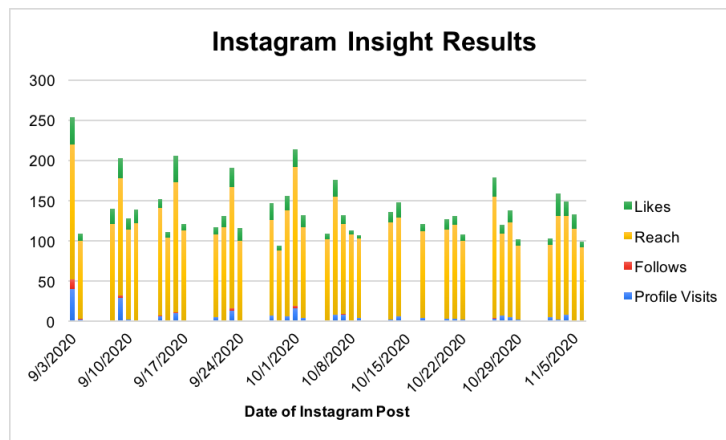
showed that the average reach per post was 119 accounts. About 48% of the Instagram followers are of ages 18-24 and 30% reside in Monterey County. The post engagement reflected that content

event promotion for organizations like the Otter Student Union and Otter Cross Culture were not as engaging to Basic Need followers. Unique program content, such as Otter Groceries and Cooking with CSUMB, were the posts that prompted organizations to share and followers to like or bookmark. Overall there was a 21% increase of followers with an average of one new follower per post throughout August 31st and November 6th.

On November 6th students were informed via social media outlets of the Basic Needs Feedback survey and had until November 14th to complete it. There were 139 participants in the survey and 5% recorded they had learned of services through social media. Based on the feedback, Otter Groceries was the service most used with 88 participants. The Basic Needs Team awarded Otter Groceries to 138 students for a total of $14,850 during Fall 2020. The second

most used service was CalFresh Assistance which supported 39 participants. Here is a table of

the CalFresh submissions for the month of October in 2019 and 2020:

October 2020 CalFresh Submission	County of Applicant	Assisted By	October 2019 CalFresh Submission	County of Applicant	Assisted By
10/29/20	Monterey		10/15/19	Monterey	CSU Monterey Bay
10/29/20	Monterey	CSU Monterey Bay	10/8/19	Monterey	CSU Monterey Bay
10/28/20	Monterey	CSU Monterey Bay			
10/27/20	Monterey				
10/26/20	Alameda	CSU Monterey Bay			
10/26/20	Monterey	CSU Monterey Bay			
10/26/20	Monterey				
10/25/20	Humboldt				
10/22/20	Monterey	CSU Monterey Bay			
10/21/20	Monterey	CSU Monterey Bay			
10/21/20	Monterey	CSU Monterey Bay			
10/21/20	Orange	CSU Monterey Bay			
10/20/20	Monterey				
10/17/20	Monterey				
10/15/20	Monterey				
10/15/20	Monterey	CSU Monterey Bay			
10/14/20	Alameda				
10/13/20	Monterey				
10/13/20	Monterey	CSU Monterey Bay			
10/13/20	Santa Clara				
10/12/20	Monterey				

10/12/20	Santa Cruz	CSU Monterey Bay			
10/9/20	Monterey				
10/9/20	Monterey				
10/9/20	Riverside				
10/7/20	Monterey	CSU Monterey Bay			
10/7/20	Los Angeles	CSU Monterey Bay			
10/7/20	Monterey	CSU Monterey Bay			
10/6/20	Santa Clara	CSU Monterey Bay			
10/5/20	Humboldt				
10/4/20	San Luis Obispo				
10/4/20	Monterey				
10/4/20	Monterey				
Total of CalFresh Submissions From 01/06/2020-11/03/2020			**Total of CalFresh Submissions From 01/06/2019-11/03/2019**		**Growth Rate from 2019 to 2020**
		142		25	468%

The table above reflects the growth of 468% from 2019 to 2020 in CalFresh applications amongst CSUMB students. About 41% of applications in 2020 were submitted during the eight weeks of the project, with October as the largest number of applicants. In 2019 all applications had to be submitted with a staff member but after the shelter-in-place, students had a high demand for food assistance so Basic Needs decided to include the CalFresh application in OASIS. Basic Needs met their expected outcome of 30% increase within CalFresh Assistance by empowering 59 students from August 31st to November 6th. The third largest Basic Needs service utilized was the Emergency Fund for 38 of participants. Basic Needs awarded $51,350 from the Emergency Fund to 114 students in the eight weeks. Overall, the expected outcomes were achieved with support of the eight-week social media content implementation.

Conclusion & Recommendations

The results from the research show that Basic Needs was essential to many students pre-COVID19 and a necessity for more once their classrooms switched to virtual learning. A social media presence is necessary for the success of services and overall wellness of CSUMB students. Survey participants voiced lack of resources for housing assistance in the Monterey County. It would be beneficial for there to be more content in regards to housing assistance. Otter Groceries, Emergency Fund, and CalFresh Assistance were our most used but the food pantry was the most listed as participants best support. A couple students mentioned they appreciated receiving text messages about events and food before the shelter-in-place. If possible, these services should be implemented in some way to support students living in East Campus. Basic Needs is supporting students at a steady rate so I would continue promotion of services through social media.

Personal Reflection

Prior to learning about the Basic Needs Initiative, I was wrapped in the stigma behind asking for help because there was always someone worse than me. Basic Needs at CSUMB advocates for the overall wellbeing with resources for every student which empowered me to seek assistance when I needed it. Throughout my experience as a CHHS Intern I learned that Basic Needs services weren't utilized because of lack of awareness amongst students. My goal was to normalize the services by using common language on content and creating the platforms for outreach. The project was able to bridge students to services they weren't aware and/or didn't know they could benefit from.

The project was successful because of the work amongst all of the Basic Needs Team: Ashley Ramsden, Joanna Snawder-Manzo, Emily Bachmeier, Sabrina Lee and Mayra Ortiz. They would share event details, service updates and resources which made it easier to create each week's content. Their direct student engagement is behind the results of this successful project. Although the project was successful there were incidents that caused me to take time off of school so I missed from posting. Since I managed the social media accounts it was difficult for others to create something last minute. After my project implementation I agreed to create content for a Basic Needs Social Media Toolkit so that there is content that could be used as backup.

The global pandemic has affected every CSUMB student in some way and Basic Needs has helped alleviate some of the burden for many. The project helped students learn of services that increased their opportunity to a healthier life, physically and mentally. Students participated in services that offered food assistance both short and long-term. The constant reminder of services motivated students to seek out assistance from Basic Needs. The high demand of need in the student population could serve as a time to outreach of the services. I recommend using both social media and email as your main form of outreach while the campus is virtual to best support students. Although the impact may feel small those students who engage daily are thrilled to have support and resources on their feeds.

If you are interning with Basic Needs don't be afraid to bring up new ideas during all staff meetings. It is the a great opportunity to receive feedback and guidance. If your role is to manage the social media, I recommend learning Hootsuite and CanvaPro first. Take advantage of the professional development opportunities when they're offered. If you're interested in implementing something similar at your agency, learn to differ how you manage your personal accounts vs. your agency's accounts. On an organizations account you should try to follow only other organizations or professional accounts. Remember that branding is essential so include your agencies logo in every post. Lastly, when times are tough and your patience is thin, think back on why you decided to major in CHHS. I recommend writing it down and taking a picture to reflect back on because before you know, you've made it!

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Appendices