

Understanding the Student Experience of Accessing Basic Needs Resources at Sacramento State

Sai Khang, California State University, Sacramento - Master of Public Health
Practicum Site: Associated Students, Inc. (ASI) Food Pantry

Introduction:

In a 2016-2017 survey of CSU students, 41% reported having experienced food insecurity.¹ Over 2,450 Sac State students (~8% of the student population) utilize the ASI Food Pantry in the 2022-2023 academic year.

Access to basic needs resources is crucial to students' academic success and health.¹

Background:

- To understand students' lived experiences navigating basic need resources.
- Cohort size was based on homogeneity and the feasibility of ensuring all students were heard.
- Provide recommendations to the ASI Food Pantry to better the student experience.

Methods:

- Sacramento State's Spring 2023 graduates were recruited for the focus groups.
- Focus group topics surrounded access to basic needs resources and food insecurity.
- Reviewed recordings, notes, and transcripts for emerging themes shared by students.

Findings:

1. Most students are open to changing the once-a-week shopping policy.
2. Students learned of the food pantry and other basic needs resources through campus events or word of mouth.
3. The food pantry was one of the primary food sources for the students.
4. Students expressed discomfort, pridefulness, embarrassment, and feared being judged when using the food pantry.
5. Meals were often planned based on the food items from the food pantry.
6. Lockers were not used due to unavailable food details, spoilage concerns, discomfort in someone else getting the food items, and inability to pick them up from the lockers.

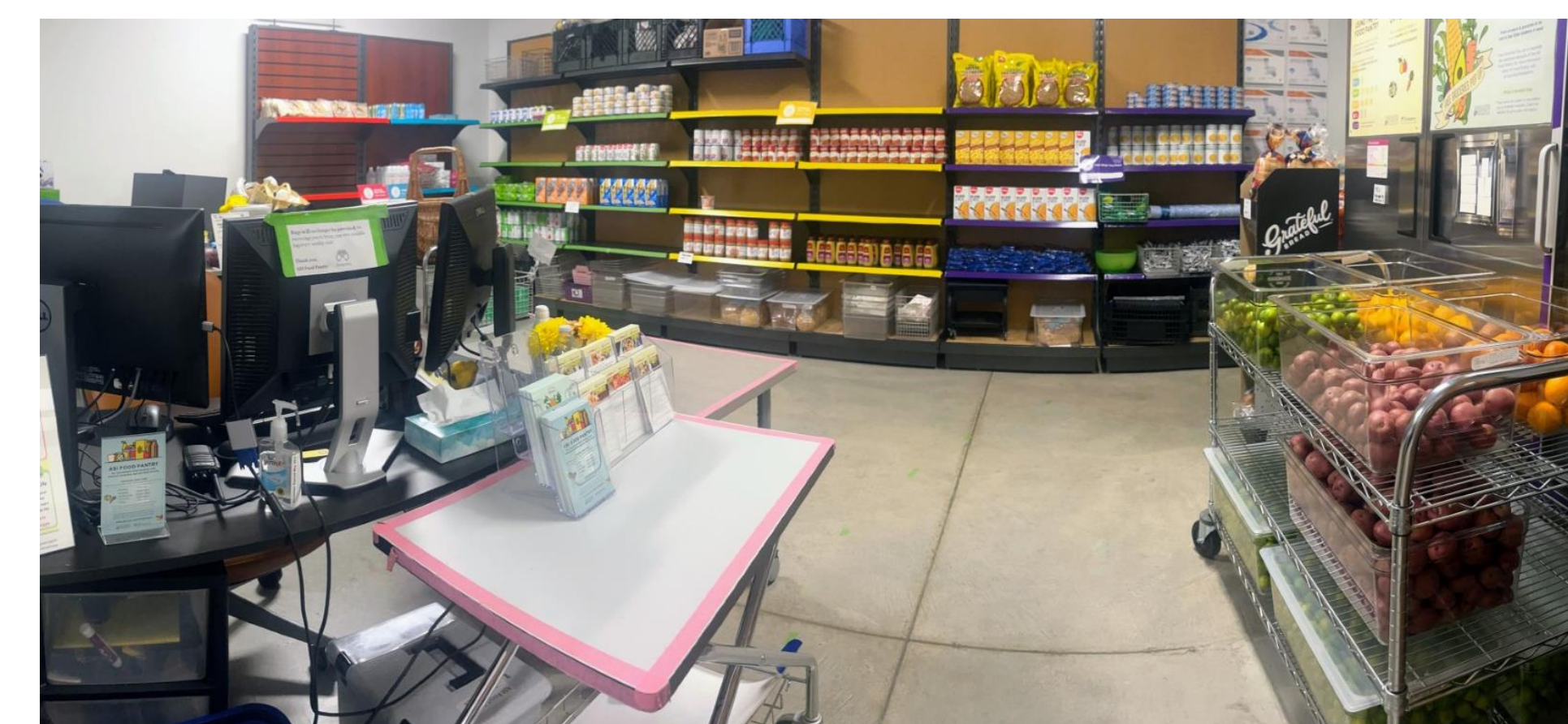
“ I feel like sometimes going by yourself can be kind of awkward and...embarrassing...because who knows? ...You might feel judged.”

“ ...I never felt any stigma except for awkwardness of how the system worked. I didn't feel familiar with anything, so [I] didn't know whether or not to grab a basket or how much I was available to get.”

Recommendations:

ASI Food Pantry should:

1. Promote the food pantry monthly using social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook.
2. Provide an in-person walkthrough of the food pantry experience for interested participants.
3. Promote newly received food items via social media or text.
4. Promote the locker service through social media or flyers to raise awareness to increase locker usage.



References:

1. The California State University. (2018, January) *Study of student basic needs*. https://www.calstate.edu/impact-of-the-csu/student-success/basic-needs-initiative/Documents/BasicNeedsStudy_phaseII_withAccessibilityComments.pdf