



San Francisco State University Emergency Meal Card Program

Program Report

Spring 2018- Spring 2020

"I graduated with the help of this resource. I was living in a van. I was able to get better grades and stay healthy overall."

- *Emergency Meal Card Recipient*

Program Summary

Access to quality food is essential for students to thrive and achieve academic success. In 2018, 47% of San Francisco State students surveyed reported experiencing food insecurity. Students who lack the resources necessary to obtain food on a regular basis are at heightened risk for negative physical and mental health outcomes, and experience lower academic achievement (Crutchfield & McGuire, 2018). In 2018, San Francisco State launched an emergency meal card program as part of a larger [Basic Needs Initiative](#). This program set out to provide students experiencing food insecurity with quality meals while on campus. Emergency meals were made available through a collaboration with Sodexo, SF State's on-campus dining vendor, and donations from students, faculty and staff. In 2020, Sodexo partnered with [Swipe out Hunger](#) to commit 2,200 meals per semester to the program. Students were screened for meal card eligibility through the [Dean-on-Call program](#), [CalFresh Help Clinic](#) or Student Health Services Nutrition Clinic. During the screening process, students were also connected with sustainable food access programs including CalFresh Help Clinic and Gator Groceries, the campus food pantry, to support a larger goal of establishing food security.



HEALTH
PROMOTION
& WELLNESS

“After receiving help I was able to improve my focus in class and was even able to meet new people in the cafeteria. It helped ease my stress with food and hunger.”

-Emergency Meal Card Recipient

Program Outcomes

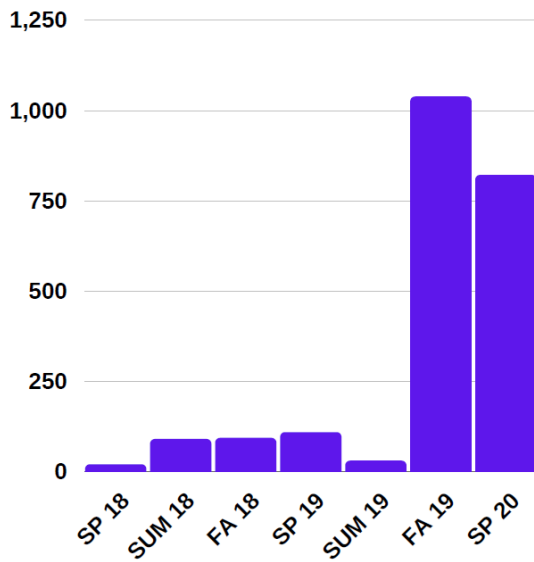
From May 2018 to May 2020, in collaboration with Sodexo, and the Dean-on-Call program, the Basic Needs Initiatives emergency meal card program provided **2,201 emergency meals to 191 students** experiencing food insecurity. Following campus-wide promotion beginning in fall 2018, the total number of students served increased ten times by the next fall semester. The vast majority of program participants, 84% utilized one emergency meal card per semester, while 16% of program participants received up to three meal cards per semester. This indicates most students accessing the program utilized meals as an emergency resource. On March 10th, 2020 SF State suspended on-campus operations due to COVID-19. Through a dedicated partnership between the Basic Needs Initiative, Sodexo and the Dean-on-Call program, emergency meal card distribution continued for the remainder of the semester, despite the campus closure. During the COVID-19 crisis in spring 2020, 325 meals were distributed to 18 students, providing an essential resource during a time of uncertainty and financial crisis.

Table: Emergency meal card distribution May 2018- May 2020

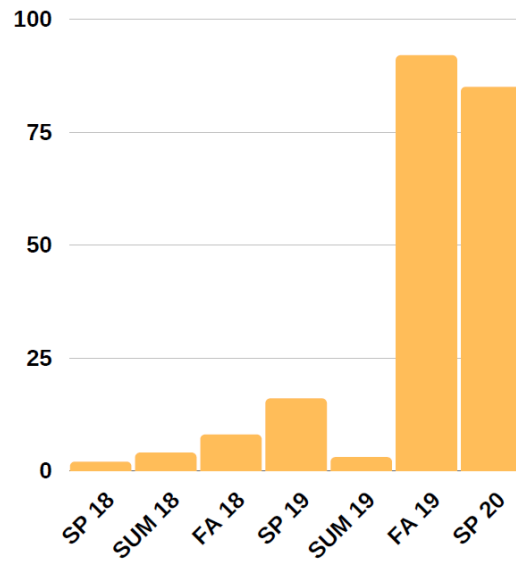
	Spring 2018	Summer 2018	Fall 2018	Spring 2019	Summer 2019	Fall 2019	Spring 2020	Total
Emergency meal cards distributed	2	9	15	18	3	114	103	264
Emergency meals used by students	20	90	93	109	30	1038	821	2201
Students served (unduplicated)	2	4	8	16	3	92	85	191

Charts: Emergency meal card distribution, and students served May 2018- May 2020

Emergency Meals Used



Students Served



"I was mentally able to let go of some stress knowing that I'd have a meal to eat & wouldn't have to worry about it financially which lead to a better improvement academically and improved my mental/social/physical state."

-Emergency Meal Card Recipient



Best Practices and Lessons Learned

Emergency meal cards provide an immediate response to student hunger- Unlike other food access programs that may require an application period or have limited service days, emergency meal cards provide instant relief for students experiencing food insecurity.

Emergency meal cards should be used to connect students to other food access programs- Meal cards are a limited resource that should be utilized as an emergency support. Students experiencing food insecurity should be connected to robust and sustainable food access programs like CalFresh assistance and campus/local food pantries to support their progression to food security.

Access points for emergency meal cards should be consistent- In order to build rapport among the campus community and allow students to trust this emergency resource, meal card distribution points should maintain consistent hours and locations as advertised. Additionally, all access points should follow a uniform screening protocol.

Outreach and messaging are foundational for program success- Campus-wide outreach including class presentations, social media and website messaging, newsletters, faculty and staff emails, visibility events and tabling activities are essential to raising consciousness in the campus community about food insecurity and the program. All messaging should be student friendly and critical of language and imagery in efforts to diversify and destigmatize student food insecurity to promote help seeking behaviors.

Strong partnerships are essential- Collaborative partnerships with campus stakeholders should foster relationship building and room for program improvement and growth. Partner meetings should be held regularly throughout development and at least once per semester after implementation. Updates and changes should be communicated with partners in a timely manner.

Diversify strategies to sustain resources – A multifaceted approach was implemented to ensure student needs were met with adequate resources. Initially, students donating meals from their meal-plan sustained the program. After our campus food vendor set limitations on the number of meals students could donate, the emergency meal pool significantly decreased. At this point, University Advancement was consulted to help implement campus fund raising strategies to sustain the program. In 2020 the emergency meal pool was replenished and expanded up to 4,400 meals per academic year through a Sodexo partnership with Swipe Out Hunger. This significant increase in resources enabled us to implement robust program outreach.

Establish consistent data tracking methods- Screening and tracking methods should be consistent across meal card access points. Trainings with student service providers should be conducted to ensure they are equipped to accurately collect information and track data about program participation. A departmental liaison should be identified to maintain data. Expectations should be clearly outlined.

Challenges

Data Limitations- Due to transitions in leadership and staffing at the start of the program, uniform data collection was a challenge. Forty-six meal cards distributed lacked completed participant information. These students were counted as individuals. Facilitating training for service providers on how to collect participant data via a food insecurity screening tool, and identifying a departmental liaisons to track and input data, immensely improved data collection outcomes.

POS System Change- In Fall 2019, Sodexo transitioned to a new POS system. This migration caused data from a set of meal cards in early fall to be inaccessible.

"It makes me feel supported and valued as a student. It also is something I can rely on even when times get hard."
-Emergency Meal Card Recipient

Moving Forward

Reflecting on the establishment and expansion of an emergency meal card program at SF State, the Basic Needs Initiatives takes pride in the exponential growth of students served. As we look toward the next phase of this program, we hope to increase the number of students served, deploy meal card access points in campus programs that support historically underserved student populations including EOP, Guardian Scholars and AB-540 Dreamers, as well as expand campus outreach and awareness about the program.

References

Crutchfield, R., & McGuire, J. (2018, January). Study of Student Basic Needs. California State University.

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