

# **Using Qualitative Research and Mixed-Methods to Advance Basic Needs Initiatives**

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# Introductions

1. Name, Institution, Position, Pronouns.
1. Briefly share your concerns/interests related basic needs.
1. What do you hope to get out of today's workshop?

# **UCSC Blum Center on Poverty, Social Enterprise, and Participatory Governance**

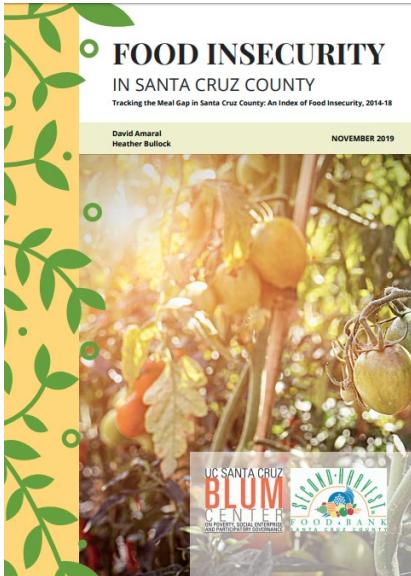
- Conducts community-engaged research related to food insecurity, housing precarity, fiscal equity, and women's economic hardship
- Our work includes:
  - Conducting participatory research (often with student teams)
  - Funding student poverty-alleviation and basic needs projects
  - Providing students with paid internship opportunities



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# Two Recent County-Wide Projects to Advance Basic Needs

- Tracking the Meal-Gap in Santa Cruz County: An Index of Food Insecurity, 2014-2018
- Mamas con Mas: Latina Mothers' Experiences with Financial Services



# Institutional Data: Undergraduate Food Insecurity

- Prevalence rate of 48%
- Higher rates found among underrepresented racial and ethnic minority students, women and non-cisgender students
- Food insecure students more likely to report being anxious, depressed, and/or upset.
- More likely to be unhoused and/or housing insecure



December 2018

**UCSC Undergraduate Food Insecurity:  
An Analysis of the 2016 University of  
California Undergraduate Experience Survey**

JCSC Blum Center on Poverty,  
Social Enterprise, and  
Participatory Governance

<https://blumcenter.ucsc.edu/>  
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AND PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE

UCSC Institutional  
Research, Assessment, and  
Policy Studies

<https://iraps.ucsc.edu/>  
UCSC  
**IRAPS**

UCSC Food Access and Basic  
Needs Working Group

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Desree A. Ryan, MA, Heather E. Bullock, PhD, Anna Sher, PhD, and Tim Galarneau, MS

# Focus Groups: Lived Experiences of Food Insecurity

- 21 focus groups over 3 quarters
- 91 participants in total
  - Included students who are parents and students who are financially responsible for their families
- Held “identity-based” focus groups
- Undergraduate research assistants involved in all phases of the project

***Do you have limited access to nutritious food?  
Do you cut portions or skip meals?  
Do you run out of food and not have money to buy more?***

If you answered YES to any of these questions,  
**WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!**



You are invited to participate in a research study examining food access at UCSC. You will be asked to share your experiences in a confidential small group setting with other students at the Blum Center (Social Science 2, room 56).

To thank you for sharing your valuable time and experiences,  
**You will receive \$50 for participating.**

**IF YOU ARE INTERESTED...**

Please contact Desiree Ryan at  
[daryan@ucsc.edu](mailto:daryan@ucsc.edu) to find out more and sign up.

# Food Insecurity Focus Groups: Key Themes

**The negative consequences of food insecurity are widely experienced both personally and academically**

"...it affects everything... when you don't eat well you can't think well, when you're stressed about where your next meal is going to come from, you can't concentrate on your work. Planning around having to be on campus late or teaching a late class... Again, the anxiety around dealing with those things. It takes so much energy to properly manage it and grad school takes all of the energy, so there's none left." -Alondra, Female, European American

**Students face a variety of multifaceted barriers to accessing healthy, nutritious food, including psychological barriers (e.g., feelings of shame, guilt, and stigma)**

"Oh what are they going to think? I'm Brown.' That's a huge misconception that we have, that the majority of Brown people receive assistance. They call Black women the 'Welfare Queen' and all of this. In reality it's a huge stigma. Not even stigma, it's racism...when you go to [national grocery chain], especially if you go over the weekend... a lot of families are doing grocery shopping and I feel like that's when you feel the most conscious because you see a bunch of white people around you" -Claudia, Female, Hispanic/Latinx

# Housing Insecurity in Santa Cruz

- 33% of CA students have experienced **housing insecurity**, which includes difficulty finding affordable housing, sacrificing other basic needs to pay rent, moving frequently, and living in crowded, unsafe conditions.
- Santa Cruz is ranked as one of the most unaffordable areas in the U.S. due to stagnant housing development, lack of rent control policies, and limited availability of affordable rentals
  - **Low-income students are especially vulnerable to housing insecurity**

# Focus Groups: How Low-Income Students Navigate the Housing Market

Are you a low-income UCSC student who has lived off campus?  
Have you struggled to find safe, affordable housing in Santa Cruz?

If this describes you, we want to hear from you!



The Blum Center is organizing confidential discussion groups to learn more about how students navigate the off-campus housing market.

Conversations will focus on barriers to securing housing and ideas for improving access.

All meetings will be held on campus.

**PARTICIPANTS WILL RECEIVE \$50**

Funded by UC Office of the President (MOP)

- **30** focus groups over 2 quarters
- **143** participants from diverse backgrounds
- Undergraduate involvement:
  - Recruited participants
  - Co-facilitated focus groups
  - Transcribed audio recordings
  - Coded transcripts

***Time to complete focus group protocol, data collection, and analysis: 9 months***

# Housing Focus Groups: Key Themes

## **Low-income status and landlord power dynamics shape experiences of housing insecurity**

*"We didn't have smoke alarms anywhere in the house until last month. There's black mold in all the bathrooms. The heater doesn't work. There's rat poop everywhere, and we've had an exterminator come several times [but] we still have rats."*

## **Impacts of housing insecurity are multifaceted and far-reaching**

*"To pay rent, I needed to work three jobs because financial aid wasn't cutting it. So I was spending 10 hours of the week [working] in the dining hall, 10 hours interning, another 10 to 20 hours doing note-taking work, all while trying to balance my class schedule. You have to think, what am I going to cut? Am I going to cut sleep, or am I going to skip a meal?"*

## **Housing challenges are exacerbated by structural barriers and discrimination**

*"[I was looking for housing] with a group that had three Asian [students] and two Caucasian [students]. After we filled out the paperwork, the property manager only called me and the two other Asian girls to criticize us, [even though] we did everything correctly. They were finding excuses to deter us or reject us. But they didn't call the other [two white students]"*

# Housing Focus Groups Next Steps

- **Disseminating findings**
  - Presenting our findings in a report to share widely across campus
  - Hosting events to discuss our findings
- **Improving existing campus housing resources**
  - Using finding to inform a more user-friendly housing registry platform
  - Designing platform for low-income students to share tips and strategies for finding housing
    - Informal housing situations (e.g., subleasing, renting shared spaces)
- **Conducting follow-up interviews with low-income students**

# Basic Needs Outreach & Stigma Assessment: Questionnaire

- **Research Question:**
  - Are outreach efforts reducing stigma and improving awareness of basic needs programs and resources?
- **Undergraduate Research Team**
- **Pretest Posttest Design**
  - Time 1: Early Winter 900 participants
  - Time 2: Late Spring 900 participants
- **Questionnaire**
  - Questionnaire assessing awareness, use, and perceptions of basic needs resources, experiences of housing/food insecurity, and stigma.
  - Open and close ended questions



*Funded by UC Office of the President (Innovation grant)*

| METHOD             | ADVANTAGES  | CONSIDERATIONS  |
|--------------------|---|---|
| Institutional Data | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Utilizes existing data to answer new questions</li> <li>- Time and cost effective</li> <li>- Higher likelihood of obtaining a representative sample</li> </ul>                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Requires partnerships</li> <li>- Requires statistical software and training</li> </ul>   |
| Focus Groups       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Captures rich student experiences</li> <li>- Effective for understanding experiences of differing identities</li> <li>- Shared experiences can be empowering for participants</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Difficult to schedule and organize (be intentional about grouping)</li> <li>- Time consuming to collect data, code, and analyze</li> <li>- Requires facilitation skills</li> </ul> |
| Interviews         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Captures rich student experiences</li> <li>- 1-on-1 discussions can foster deeper sharing</li> <li>- Easier to organize and schedule than focus groups</li> </ul>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Time consuming to collect data, code, and analyze</li> </ul>   |
| Questionnaires     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can collect open ended and close ended responses</li> <li>- Time efficient</li> <li>- Higher likelihood of obtaining a representative sample</li> </ul>                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students may have "survey burnout"</li> <li>- Requires statistical software and training</li> </ul>  |

# Basic Needs Research Brainstorm

# Step 1: Formulating Your Research Question

**What information would help your campus better serve students and improve basic needs?**

- *e.g., food insecurity, housing precarity, mental health challenges, lack of transportation*

**What is your research question(s)?**

- *Which group(s) of students are especially vulnerable to experiencing basic needs challenges?*  
*What are students' experiences using existing campus resources?*

**Which method(s) can best address your research questions?**

## Step 2: Identifying Focal Populations and Partners

**Which campus groups need to be heard from to better understand the scope and consequences of unmet basic needs? Are there underserved groups whose voices are unheard (e.g., Pell-grant students, EOP students, LGBTQ+ students)?**

**Who might partner with you on this project?** (e.g., *Institutional Research, Health Center, student groups, food pantries, local food banks, other local nonprofits and community organizations*)

## Step 3: Outcomes and Dissemination

**How would you leverage insights from your findings to advance basic needs initiatives on your campus?** (e.g., *Which stakeholders would you prioritize sharing your findings with? What policies or programs do you want the research to inform?*)

**How will you share your findings? What product(s) will you produce?**  
*(e.g., written report, campus and/or conference presentation, art showing, policy brief?)*

# Research Considerations

- **Familiarize yourself with the research literature and resources and programs on your campus**
- **Work closely with your Institutional Review Board**
- **Research can be costly, but it is a valuable investment**
- **Be generous with your timeline – *projects always take longer than expected!***

# Thank you!



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