

# Beyond a Can Drive: Commitments and Collaborative Efforts for Addressing Students' Food Insecurity

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## Abstract

Addressing students' food insecurity is a complicated problem, both in securing healthy food resources and reducing the stigma around being food insecure. A partnership between ASI, the Department of Housing and Residential Education, and Recreation and Wellness created an innovative campus garden to help remedy student food insecurity. The community garden teaches students how to use inexpensive resources to grow and harvest healthy vegetables, and The Obershaw DEN pantry provides a distribution site, vegetable peelers and easy recipes with garden ingredients. The commitment of campus and community partnerships has driven the success of the garden from student, staff and faculty involvement to maintain the garden, grant writing and securing of donations of time and materials from the CSUSB Greenhouse, the City of San Bernardino Municipal Water Department, the Inland Empire Resource Conservation District, and the American Heart Association's Teaching Garden program. The goals are to demonstrate that gardening can combat the stigma associated with food insecurity, that garden grown vegetables are both nutritious and delicious, and the valuable life skills that can be learned through growing your own food. Educational programming surrounding the garden has provided opportunities for students to learn how to make a healthy and sustainable impact on their college experience. The contributions of harvested produce from the community garden have added great value to existing efforts to provide low to no cost food to students including the emergency food pack program, hot meal cards and the ability to purchase food from campus dining at a reduced cost.

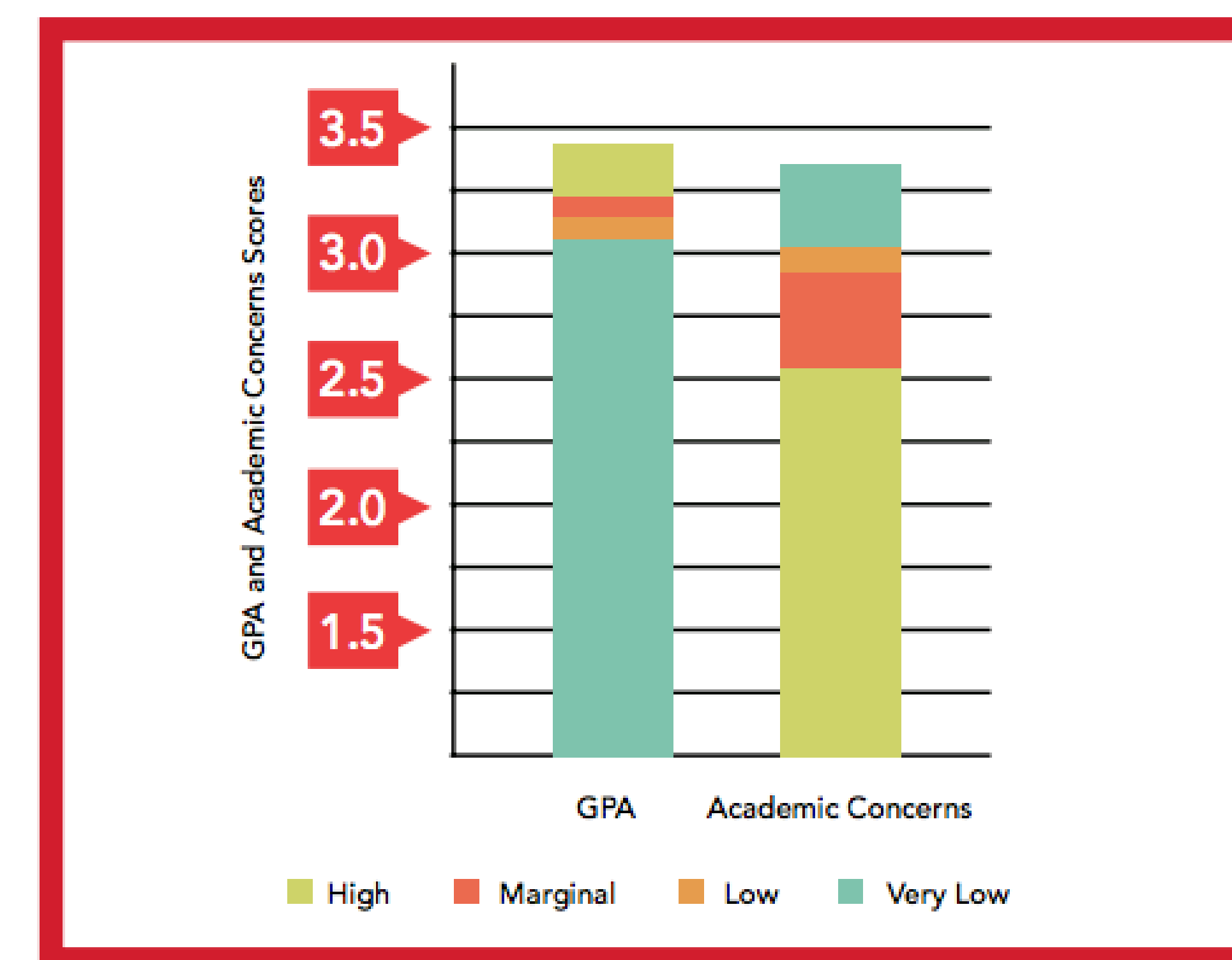
## The Issue

- 49.1 Million Americans are food insecure (Bradham, Moorthy, Beyer, & Kerman, 2015).
- 31% of students report needing to choose between food and tuition (Bradham et al., 2015).
- 4.65 Million students rely on food pantries (Bradham et al., 2015).
- Food insecurity can affect academic performance, student behavior and engagement and thereby affecting retention and graduation rates (Cady, 2014).
- 14% of colleges students experienced some form of food insecurity (Cady, 2014).
- Food insecurity is more likely to adversely affect populations that are already underserved (Cady, 2014).



## Purpose Statement

Collaborators identified the need for students to have increased access to food on the California State University, San Bernardino main campus, to combat food insecurity. This commitment to student led to the implementation of the Community Garden, Den Pack Distribution, Food at Cost, and Hot Meal Cards to address student needs.



**Figure 4**  
Food security as it is related to academics.

**Note.** GPA was based on self-report. Academic Concerns were created from the Presenting Problems Scale using a continuous variable from 1-5 based on current level of stress, where the score goes up with greater concern.

(Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018)



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## Community Garden

**Inspiration:** The Community Garden is a student driven initiative prompted by the Associated Students Incorporated of CSUSB. ASI was motivated to secure healthier food options for student on campus, and to provide sustainability education to students.

The goal of the community garden was to provide students with a hands-on experience to learn about sustainability and have a lasting impact on students' knowledge and desire for a sustainable community, meeting goals of the CSUSB Strategic Plan 2015-2020.

**Process:** In 2016, ASI and the Department of Housing and Residential Education staff and Green House Living Learning Community student leader collaborated to submit a grant proposal for the Cal State Student Association Greenovation fund. CSUSB was awarded \$2,000 to cover start-up costs.

The campus community assisted preparing the garden location in Housing, and preparing 5 raised-beds for the community garden. Vegetable and herb plants, donated by Bonnie Plants through the Teaching Garden Program with the American Heart Association, were planted on the Community Garden Grand Opening on October 10, 2017.

Additional partnerships were made with the CSUSB Greenhouse, the City of San Bernardino Municipal Water Department, and the Inland Empire Resource Conservation District for donations of materials and time spent to teach students about the garden.

**Outcome:** Students and the campus community have successfully maintained the community garden, completed harvests for donations to volunteers and the Obershaw DEN pantry, transplanted new crops and sowed seeds. The garden has yielded donations 80+ pounds of produce from Fall 2017 to Spring 2018.

**Impact:** The garden has created many opportunities for collaboration across campus and the Inland Empire that has shown students the positive impact they have made for the campus, future students, and current students to combat food insecurity.



## Obershaw Day Packs

**Inspiration:** Congruent with the research and data collected by the CSU Basic Needs Initiative statewide, 36.6% of CSUSB students reported food insecurity. Of those students 18.7% experienced low food security and 17.9% very low food security. The need for Day Packs was identified in order to assist student with short-term food insecurity while on campus. Obershaw Day Pack offer quick food options that do not require a preparation for student in need to get a meal while on campus. Students in need of a Day Pack often display levels of distress due to hunger, which impact their academic success.

**Process:** The Office of Community Engagement was able to work with multiple campus partners to establish locations including centers in the SMSU and Housing where a student in need could receive a day pack. This always students to gain easier access to this resources without having to wait for the Obershaw Den's hours of operations. All distributed packs are recorded and reported to the DEN to follow-up with these students for long-term assistance. The DEN is relayed student information to follow-up for long-term assistance.

**Outcome:** The DEN Packs eased students' financial stress and have created easy access when unable to go to the DEN directly during the limited hours. 200+ packs have been distributed each month at 12 campus locations.

**Impact:** CSUSB is able to assist students to meet nutritional food intake, relieving the stress of food insecurity and impacting their academic success. The DEN Packs provide students with additional options for food access after campus dining options have closed.



## Meal Vouchers

**Overview:** The Office of Community Engagement [OCE], Department of Housing and Residential Education [DHRE] and ASI met during the summer of 2017 and identified the distribution of meal cards as an alternative to the Den pack. The DHRE Executive Director met with the UEC Director and negotiated terms. UEC, DHRE and ASI contributed \$1,000 each to the purchasing of Meal Vouchers.

**Inspiration:** The ASI Board of Directors committed to ensuring that students that experienced food insecurity had access to healthy food options.

**Process:** There are two ways that students can obtain a meal voucher. Individuals that face food insecurity frequent the Den to pick up food. The Den staff get to know a lot about these individuals through their interactions. The knowledge of these individuals hardships are used to determine who should receive a Meal Voucher.

**Outcome:** Meal Vouchers are currently distributed through the CARE team, OCE, and DHRE to students that face food insecurity. As of Week 6, Spring 2018 37 Vouchers have been distributed for all you care to eat dinner service. In Spring 2018, availability of the Vouchers were increased with Health Center and CAPS distribution.

**Impact:** The Meal Vouchers program has been useful in assisting our students with the most need. We will be looking at how individuals receive this benefit are determined to increase utilization.

## Food at Cost

**Overview:** ASI has historically purchased food for the Den at a rate of \$1,000 per quarter from Restaurant Depot.

**Inspiration:** An ASI Director from California State University, Los Angeles reported on how they were able to purchase food from their food provider at cost for their food pantry. The CSUSB ASI leadership team met with the Sodexo leadership team. Sodexo pledged to match the amount of food that ASI purchased from their distributor. ASI can purchase food at 70% of market value and Sodexo matches dollar for dollar what is spent.

**Process:** A member from the Office of Community Engagement meets with one of Sodexo's chefs and places an order for food items that meet the needs of the Den. Sodexo invoices the half of the cost.

**Outcome:** The Den was able to fill its food panty and feed CSUSB students that face food insecurity.