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I'M NOT THAT NEEDY: BLACK STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF FOOD ASSISTANCE AND THE IMPACT OF SELF-CATEGORIZATION ON CAMPUS FOOD PANTRY UTILIZATION

by

Catherine M. Jermany

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify which student groups Black students perceive as needing food assistance, to explore how Black students' perceptions of students in need impacts their decision to utilize the on-campus food pantry at California State University, Dominguez Hills (CSUDH), and to identify the circumstances that influence Black students' self-categorization. Nine, Black-identified students enrolled at CSUDH participated in semi-structured interviews that were transcribed and coded using a grounded theory approach. Results of the study revealed that Black students generally perceived low-income students, unemployed or overemployed students, students experiencing food insecurity, and students with non-traditional housing or experiencing homelessness as needing food assistance and being users of the campus's food pantry. Additionally, Black students generally perceived those needing food assistance as individuals experiencing financial hardships due to a lack of or limited sources of income. Finally, qualitative data revealed that financial circumstances and food security status were two main factors that influenced Black students' self-categorization as users or non-users of the campus's food pantry. Results of this study emphasize the need to disassociate the campus's food pantry from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and advertise the pantry under a different name and as a standalone resource. Implications also include launching a new marketing campaign that highlights the diversity of campus food pantry users to change the perception that the campus's food pantry is only for impoverished students in dire need of food.

Keywords: basic needs, food insecurity, food assistance, campus food pantry, self-categorization

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DEDICATION

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CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

Poor eating habits, lack of sleep, and financial insecurity have historically been seen as character-building experiences for college students. However, the starving student stereotype and the glorification of surviving on ramen noodles glosses over a very real and serious problem - food insecurity. Recent findings by Goldrick-Rab et al. (2017) and Nazmi et al. (2018) suggest that as many as one in two undergraduates experience some degree of food insecurity, which is defined as the "limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways" (Anderson, 1990, p. A-1). With nearly 50% of college students reporting having experienced food insecurity, the prevalence of food insecurity among college students now surpasses the national average where approximately 11% of households in 2020 reported being food insecure (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2021). As a result of this growing demographic of food-insecure college students, hundreds of college and university food pantries have been established across the nation with the hopes of providing free, healthy, and easily accessible food options to students (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2018).

Background

The California State University (CSU) System is the largest university system in the nation, consisting of 23 campuses and nearly 500,000 enrolled students. In 2018, the CSU Office of the Chancellor funded the *Study of Student Basic Needs* (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018), which explored the experiences of students facing food and housing insecurity and the relationship to student success. Of the respondents, nearly 42% of CSU students reported food insecurity, with first-generation Black students reporting the

highest levels of food insecurity (65.9%) of all demographic groups. Furthermore, the study revealed that on-campus pantry utilization was minimal among students even among food-insecure students who reported experiencing 'low' and 'very low' degrees of food security. For example, of those students who reported food insecurity, approximately 42% of students experienced either 'low' or 'very low' food security; however, these students only utilized the campus food pantry at the rate of 9.8% and 12.7%, respectively (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018).

A follow-up study conducted by the CSU Office of the Chancellor in 2019, aimed to provide an in-depth exploration of CSU students' basic needs insecurity as it related to access to on- and off-campus resources. Survey data revealed that nearly 90% of respondents had not used the campus food pantry in the past 12 months (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2019). Additionally, although nearly 60% of all Black students reported being either 'only food insecure' or 'food insecure and homeless', just 14% of Black students had ever used their campus food pantry. Additionally, over a third of Black students claimed that they had heard about their campus's food pantry but never used it (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2019).

Findings by the CSU Office of the Chancellor are consistent with existing literature that repeatedly shows that food insecurity is prevalent among Black college students and that most college students, regardless of race do not utilize their campus's food pantry (Camelo & Elliott, 2019; El Zein et al., 2018; Weaver et al., 2019). Common reasons for lack of use include negative social stigma, lack of knowledge about the pantry, and institutional barriers such as inconvenient operational hours (El Zein et al., 2018; King, 2017; McArthur et al., 2020; Yamashiro, 2019; Yanniello, 2018). These

reoccurring findings about campus food pantry underutilization are problematic since campus food pantries have been identified as a necessary intervention to combat food insecurity among college students.

Lastly, the two studies by the CSU Office of the Chancellor uncovered significant academic disparities between food-secure and insecure students (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018; 2019). These findings contribute to the growing literature that supports the notion that food insecurity negatively impacts academic performance (Camelo & Elliott, 2019; Phillips et al., 2018; Weaver et al., 2019; Woerden et al., 2019). In the *Study of Student Service Access and Basic Needs* report, Crutchfield and Maguire (2019) found that food-insecure, homeless Black students reported an average GPA of 2.92 – the lowest compared to all other racial/ethnic groups. These results were consistent with the findings of two recently conducted studies on food insecurity and academic success, which found that food insecurity hurts the academic performance (e.g., grade point average) of Black college and university students (Camelo & Elliott, 2019; Monroe, 2020).

Within the CSU System, graduation rates for Black students have increased over recent years, but academic disparities still exist. Black students enrolled within the CSU System have significantly lower four- and six-year graduation rates than White CSU students. Data from a 2021 report revealed that only 14% of Black men graduate within four years compared to 36% of White men, and less than half as many Black women (24%) graduate in four years than White women (52%) (Campbell et al., 2021). Data on six-year graduation rates showed that overall, Black students graduated at significantly lower rates than the average of 62%. Specifically, it was found that Black men and

women have six-year graduation rates of 42% and 53% respectively (Campbell et al., 2021).

With less than 20,000 Black students enrolled throughout the CSU System, Black students only account for 4% of the CSU System student population though these students experience disproportionate rates of food insecurity than any other racial/ethnic demographic. Research suggests that food insecurity can be linked to lower academic achievement, which may perpetuate the achievement gap between Black students and their non-Black peers. However, existing literature reveals that campus food pantry usage among students and particularly Black students is significantly low due to perceived and institutional barriers. Therefore, intentional efforts from relevant university officials are needed to better understand and address the factors that determine students' pantry utilization, specifically with regard to Black students who are at higher risk of being food insecure. These efforts will be critical to increasing campus pantry utilization among food-insecure students and may lead to increased academic performance, retention, and graduation rates of Black students within the CSU.

Statement of Problem

Campus food pantries are not reaching a population of food-insecure students for reasons other than those commonly identified in existing literature (e.g., social stigma, lack of knowledge about resources, and institutional barriers). This may be due to a disconnect between how higher education professionals and students themselves assess the need for food assistance. Best practices for assessing the prevalence and risk of food insecurity among college and university students include using objective markers such as socioeconomic status (SES), Pell Grant eligibility, and data from food security surveys.

Consequently, these objective markers are also used to predict the demographic outcomes of campus pantry usage. However, many students base their decision to utilize campus food pantries on their own objective markers and perceived hierarchy of most- to least-neediest students and therefore, may not assess themselves as being "needy enough" to utilize campus food pantries regardless of their food-insecure status.

These two conflicting assessments of need may explain why student populations such as Black students, who are known to experience high rates of food insecurity, do not utilize campus food pantries. In an unpublished executive summary on the California State University, Dominguez Hills' (CSUDH) Basic Needs Program, it was reported that Black students utilized food-assistance services at inequitably low rates compared to their non-Black peers (California State University, Dominguez Hills [CSUDH], 2021). Therefore, the problem addressed in this study is the underutilization of campus pantries among Black students, specifically at CSUDH. To address this problem, this study will contribute a different perspective on the factors that influence campus food pantry utilization among Black college and university students and thus, help inform best practices for CSUDH basic needs staff looking to increase campus food pantry utilization rates among the Black student population. With the largest percentage of Black students of any public four-year university in the state of California, CSUDH serves as a model campus for alleviating food insecurity among Black students enrolled in post-secondary institutions. Thus, the findings of this study may greatly benefit other institutions throughout the nation with substantial Black student populations such as California community colleges and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify which student groups Black students perceive as needing food assistance, to explore how Black students' perceptions of students in need impacts their decision to utilize the on-campus food pantry at CSUDH, and to identify the circumstances that influence Black students' self-categorization. By seeking to understand the perceptions of Black students, this study aims to contribute a different perspective on the factors that can influence or deter campus food pantry utilization and thus, help inform best practices for basic needs staff at CSUDH.

Research Questions

The three research questions guiding this study will include:

1. Which student groups do Black students perceive as needing food assistance and being users of the campus's food pantry?
2. How do Black students' perceptions of students who need food assistance influence their decision to utilize the on-campus food pantry?
3. What circumstances influence Black students' decision to self-categorize as needing and not needing food-assistance?

CHAPTER II – LITERATURE REVIEW

According to national data, one in two college students experience food insecurity in the United States, which is at least three times higher than the national average (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2017; Nazmi et al., 2018). To address food insecurity on campus, institutions have implemented an array of interventions including food recovery programs, meal-sharing programs, campus gardens, and the most popular – food pantries (Yamashiro, 2019). The first known campus food pantry was established by students in 1993 at Michigan State University (MSU), thus making the MSU Student Food Bank the longest-running college food pantry in the nation (Michigan State University, n.d.). In 2012, the MSU Student Food Bank and the Oregon State University Food Pantry co-founded the College & University Food Bank Alliance (CUFBA) to aid existing and newly created campus food pantries with information, resources, and an extensive network (Michigan State University, n.d.). As of September 2019, the organization consisted of 686 members (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2018).

Since the establishment of food pantries on college and university campuses are a relatively new phenomenon, data on how they are utilized is relatively sparse (El Zein et al., 2018). The research that does exist, however, reveals that students' socio-demographics such as sex, gender, race, ethnicity, financial aid eligibility, and basic needs status are all common predictors of campus food pantry utilization (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2019; El Zein et al., 2018; Esaryk et al., 2021; King, 2017; Parks, 2021; Twill et al., 2016; Yamashiro, 2019). However, recent literature has also uncovered that a large majority of college students do not utilize their campus's food pantry for reasons including negative social stigma, embarrassment, and lack of knowledge about the

resource (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018; El Zein et al., 2018; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2018; King, 2017; McArthur, 2020; Parks, 2021; Yanniello, 2018). Factors such as students' self-identification with the term food-insecure and students' perceptions of need have also been named as factors that contribute to campus pantry underutilization (Daugherty et al., 2019; Fong et al., 2016; McArthur, 2020); however, the relationship between these two factors has not been thoroughly researched within higher education.

Predictors of Campus Food Pantry Utilization

Sex and Gender

Findings on the relationship between a student's sex or gender and campus food pantry utilization are inconsistent. Some studies have determined that students who identify as female are more likely to be campus pantry clients (El Zein et al., 2018; Hanbazaza et al., 2016; McArthur et al., 2020; Twill et al., 2016), which is reasonable given that females are generally known to report experiencing higher rates of food insecurity (Goldrick-Rab, et al., 2017). However, Crutchfield and Maguire (2018) concluded that males and females utilize campus food pantries at similar rates. Furthermore, at least one study found a statistically significant relationship between being male and the frequency of campus food pantry visits, which suggests that although females account for a larger proportion of overall campus pantry users, male students may be more inclined to visit their campus's food pantry more frequently (Esaryk et al., 2021).

A significant part of campus food pantry utilization depends on a student's ability to seek help. Therefore, the influence of gender norms and social stigma as it applies to help-seeking behavior may explain the differences in campus pantry utilization between

male and female students. For example, social stigma is commonly reported as a barrier to campus pantry utilization, and Magovcevic and Addis (2005) argued that men are less likely to seek help for problems that they perceive to be stigmatizing (as cited in Cole & Ingram, 2019). To add, Juvrud and Rennels (2017) noted that help-seeking can be perceived as detrimental to men because it can make them appear incompetent, inferior, and dependent on others.

Increasing help-seeking behaviors among all students, but specifically among male students has important practical implications. For example, students who are willing to utilize their campus's food pantry early on may be more likely to find a permanent solution to food insecurity quicker by referrals from the campus pantry or basic needs staff members. Therefore, interventions and campaigns that are aimed at reframing help-seeking as behavior consistent with men's gender roles may increase campus pantry utilization among male students. However, more research is needed to examine how gender stereotypes affect help-seeking behaviors as it pertains to campus food pantry utilization.

Race and Ethnicity

On average, students of color are overwhelmingly identified as being more likely to utilize campus food pantries at higher rates than their White peers (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2019). Within the CSU System, Black students were the most likely of any race or ethnicity to be current users of their campus's food pantry, followed by Hispanic (6.3%), Asian (5.8%), and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (5.5%) students (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2019). These findings align with the findings of similar studies conducted at other institutions throughout the United States. At the University of

Mississippi, it was discovered that race had a statistically significant relationship with campus food pantry use and that Asian (41.2%) and Black (38.7%) students were more likely than White students (10.3%) to utilize the campus food pantry (Parks, 2021). El Zein et al. (2018), who conducted a study on the campus of the University of Florida, found that nearly a third (29.3%) of non-White students reported using the food pantry as opposed to only 11.7% of White students. Furthermore, at an institution in southwestern Ohio, Twill et al. (2016), reported that Black students accounted for at least half (50.7%) of campus food pantry visitors, followed by Whites (26.2%).

The disproportionate utilization of campus food pantries between White students and students of color may largely be due to students of color experiencing higher rates of food insecurity than their White counterparts, and therefore, are more likely to utilize on-campus food resources. Within the literature, data consistently indicates that race and ethnicity are associated with food insecurity, especially among Black, Asian, and non-White Hispanic students (Chaparro et al., 2009; Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018; Dubick et al., 2016; Freudenberg et al., 2011; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015, 2018; Maroto et al., 2015; Payne-Sturges et al., 2018). This corresponds with national data which shows that rates of food insecurity among Black (21.7%) and non-White Hispanic (17.2%) households are significantly higher than the national average (10.5%) (USDA, 2021a).

The relationship between race/ethnicity and food insecurity is also complexly intertwined with other determinants of food insecurity such as poverty, unemployment, and income. For example, per 2020 Census data, Blacks had the highest poverty rate (19.5%), the highest unemployment rate (11.4%), and the lowest median household income ($45,870) of all races (Shrider et al., 2021). Thus, the concentration of economic

disadvantages among Black individuals is a significant driver of higher rates of food insecurity and consequently, higher rates of campus food pantry utilization (Odoms-Young, 2018). Therefore, to address the persistent racial disparities in food insecurity, higher education professionals also need to develop institutional policies and practices that specifically address structural inequities. These efforts will allow for the creation of programs and initiatives that promote equity in food access and student health and wellbeing (Odoms-Young, 2018).

Federal Pell Grant Recipients

The Federal Pell Grant provides need-based aid to undergraduate students from low-income families and is the cornerstone of the federal student aid program. Several studies suggest a strong correlation between receiving the Federal Pell Grant and campus food pantry usage. Twill et al. (2016) found that of campus food pantry users, over half (57%) of respondents reported having received the Federal Pell Grant. Subsequent studies that support this finding revealed that students who were recipients of the Federal Pell Grant were more likely to utilize the campus food pantry compared to their non-recipient counterparts (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2019; El Zein et al., 2018; Esarky et al., 2021).

During the 2021-22 award year, Pell Grants ranged from $650 to $6,495 (National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators [NASFAA], 2021). Pell Grant amounts are determined by an institution's cost of attendance and the student's financial need. According to the most recent end-of-year report, over 80% of Pell Grant recipients came from low-income families that had a household income of less than $40,000 (NASFAA, 2021). Additionally, the report showed that students of color are more likely to be Pell Grant recipients, with nearly 60% of Black students, and approximately half of

all Native American and Hispanic receiving Pell Grants compared to roughly a third of White students (NASFAA, 2021).

The use of campus food pantries by Pell Grant recipients highlights the ongoing issue of college affordability. The cost of earning a degree has risen exponentially and rarely do financial aid packages cover the cost of tuition, housing, course fees, and living expenses. For example, the 2021-22 maximum Pell Grant of $6,495 covers less than a third of the average cost of attendance at a public four-year institution, whereas the maximum Pell Grant in 1975-76 covered more than 75% of the cost of attendance at a public four-year institution (NASFAA, 2021). Although Congress has increased the Pell Grant amount over the years, the gap between Federal Pell Grant aid and the cost of attendance still exists. Therefore, with limited aid, students of color may be vulnerable to financial instability leading them to experience food insecurity.

Housing Security Status

Despite housing stability being a nationwide issue, it remains a poorly defined concept with no agreed-upon definition to date (Frederick et al., 2014). Nonetheless, Frederick et al. (2014) defines housing security as, "the extent to which an individual's customary access to housing of reasonable quality is secure" (p. 965). On the contrary, housing insecurity has several definitions but is generally defined by both the United States Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the United States Department of Education (DOE) as, "individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence" (Youth, n.d., para. 5-7). However, currently, there is no agreed-upon instrument that is used to consistently measure housing insecurity thus, survey questions are generally created from HUD and DOE definitions (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018).

To date, only a few studies have explored the direct relationship between housing security and campus food pantry usage. Crutchfield and Maguire (2019) found that within the CSU System, students who reported being housing-insecure accounted for 10.8% of campus food pantry users. Furthermore, they found that students who reported experiencing both food and housing insecurity accounted for the greatest proportion of campus food pantry users (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2019). Similarly, Esaryk et al. (2021) uncovered that those students with unstable housing (i.e., housing-insecure or homeless) were more likely to have more frequent campus food pantry visits than housing secure students who lived off-campus.

Individuals who experience homelessness or housing insecurity have a higher risk of experiencing food insecurity than the general population (Baggett et al., 2011; Gundersen et al., 2003; Lee & Greif, 2008). Within the college population, homelessness and housing insecurity are also key predictors of experiencing food insecurity, which may explain the increased rate of food pantry utilization (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015). The lack of stable housing and insufficient food can hinder a student's ability to concentrate on their coursework and thus, negatively affect their academic performance and co-curricular involvement. Furthermore, since food insecurity is not always uniformly experienced by students experiencing housing insecurity and may be exacerbated by other factors, more research is needed to address the intersectionality between food and housing insecurity, and race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation.

Barriers to Utilizing Campus Food Pantries

Lack of Awareness

Lack of awareness that a food pantry existed on campus was one of the most identified barriers to utilizing the campus food pantry. According to King (2017), less than a quarter (23%) of students reported being aware of a food pantry on their respective campus, meaning that the majority of students (77%) had no knowledge of the resource. These findings are consistent with several other studies conducted on campus food pantry utilization. In support of King's (2017) findings, Crutchfield and Maguire (2018) also found that a lack of awareness of the campus food pantry was present across all levels of food security. Specifically, over a third of all students experiencing high (37.3%), marginal (33.8%), low (33.2%), and very low (37.1%) food security responded that they never heard of their campus's food pantry (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018).

Likewise, when Yanniello (2018) inquired about students' awareness of their campus's food pantry, almost half (44.7%) of respondents indicated that they were not aware that a food pantry existed on campus before completing the survey. Furthermore, the majority of students responded that they did not know where their campus's food pantry was located (73.7%) and 57.6% reported that their unawareness of the location either prevented them or made it very difficult for them to utilize the campus food pantry (Yanniello, 2018). More recently, Parks (2021) reported that 20.2% of all student respondents indicated that they either needed or wanted to use the campus food pantry but decided against it due to confusion or uncertainty. However, Parks (2021) highlighted that the number increased to 51.9% among students experiencing food insecurity.

Marketing strategies to increase awareness of campus food pantries vary by institution but usually involve the use of social media. However, Parks (2021) revealed that social media is a relatively ineffective method for reaching food insecure students, and even with an increase in social media marketing (due to the COVID-19 pandemic), physical flyers were still responsible for informing students about the campus food pantry. In fact, students were more likely to hear about the campus food pantry from a flyer or poster (23.6%), than from a friend (22.7%) or from social media (18.9%). Although further research needs to be conducted within the area of campus food pantry awareness and effective marketing, the findings by Parks (2021) highlight the need for more administrative or university support in spreading the word about campus food pantries, including the use of official university communications and the placement of physical ads on buses, trash cans, and yard signs (Parks, 2021).

Social Stigma and Embarrassment

Social stigma and feelings of embarrassment are commonly reported by students as reasons for not utilizing their campus's food pantry. In their studies, both El Zein et al. (2018) and Yanniello (2018) noted that students identified feelings of embarrassment as a factor that deterred them from using the campus food pantry. Comparably, McArthur (2020) highlighted that one of the main reasons why students who experience food insecurity never utilized the pantry was because they felt embarrassed asking for food assistance (20%). In other studies, students also expressed not wanting to utilize their campus's food pantry out of fear of judgment from their peers. In fact, Parks (2021) found a statistically significant relationship between students who reported feeling judged for pantry use and wanting to use the pantry in a time of need. Consistent with these

findings, King (2017) revealed that approximately 50% of students reported not wanting to be served by fellow students at the campus food pantry, and 59.5% of students did not want others to know that they needed food assistance. Yanniello (2018) also reported similar results in that nearly a quarter (24.2%) of students indicated that they might worry that their peers would think negatively of them if they were seen using the campus pantry.

There has been a long-standing stigma surrounding food insecurity and pantry usage, so much so, that even when food assistance resources are available to those in need, social and cultural stigmas of accepting free food from a food pantry may prevent students from accessing the resources needed to maintain their wellbeing. Therefore, college campus officials should carefully consider ways to reduce the stigma of food pantry usage including selecting a food pantry location that is centrally located but private, providing a healthy variety of culturally relevant food options, and normalizing food pantry utilization through the use of marketing materials and course syllabi. These simple methods address the ongoing stigma surrounding food pantry usage and can aid in the increase of campus pantry utilization among college students.

Self-Identity and Perceptions of Need

Although campus food pantries are generally marketed as open access resources available for use by any student no matter their food security status, due to society's ingrained association between food pantries and poverty, utilization of campus food pantries typically requires students to self-categorize as food-insecure or perceive themselves as an individual in need of food assistance. However, if a student fails to identify as such, they may be less likely to utilize a campus food pantry. Two studies

shed light on this phenomenon, including a study by Daugherty et al. (2019), who explored the experiences of three students experiencing food insecurity and their use of a campus food pantry at a rural four-year public university. Although all students met the definition of being food-insecure, two students did not identify themselves as food-insecure to any extent, while one student partially identified with the term (Daugherty et al., 2019). This lack of self-categorization or feeling like the campus pantry is not intended for students like them, has also been cited by (El Zein et al., 2018), and may very well contribute to students underutilizing their campus's food pantry.

A student's self-categorization as food-insecure is also commonly intertwined with their perception of need and associated with campus pantry underutilization. In other words, if a student does not categorize themselves as food-insecure, they may not perceive themselves as being in need of campus's food pantry resources. According to McArthur (2020), one of the top three reasons why students experiencing food insecurity never visited the campus pantry was because they believed that others needed more than them. This narrative was also highlighted and expanded upon in Crutchfield and Maguire's (2018) study, where a student by the name of Dilbert disclosed that after leaving his campus's food pantry, he thought to himself, "Damn, this is meant for somebody who actually needs it…I don't actually need it. So, I tried to never go again…" (p. 16). Crutchfield and Maguire (2018) noted that many other participants who stressed about needing food also felt feelings of guilt like Dilbert because they perceived there to be a hierarchy of need.

Despite their own financial hardship and food insecurity, students do not perceive themselves to be food-insecure or needy enough to use the campus food pantry.

Therefore, although official definitions of food insecurity and food need are necessary for practical reasons, these definitions should not be assumed to represent how students define themselves or their situation. Findings on students' perceptions of need and self-identification of food-insecure show that further understanding is needed to help higher education professionals improve their campus's food pantry and reach more students in need. Specifically, higher education professionals may need to consider a shift away from marketing practices that communicate a dire need for campus pantry donations or that the campus pantry is to support only the neediest of students. Messages like these can have unintended consequences and may deter students away from campus pantry utilization.

Conclusion

Although widely implemented, campus food pantries are extremely understudied. The lack of literature detailing the differences in sociodemographic characteristics, perceptions, and experiences of students who use a campus pantry and those who do not, poses significant challenges for higher education professionals. Since campus food pantries are often required to address complex systems of inequities that are traditionally experienced by students within marginalized groups, the lack of understanding of campus food pantry usage and potential barriers to use may result in the neediest students being underserved. As colleges and universities throughout the nation continue to establish and maintain campus food pantries, higher education professionals must deepen their understanding of campus pantry utilization by examining the factors that influence and deter students from accessing food resources. Doing so will provide the necessary context to develop and implement initiatives that reduce barriers and encourage campus pantry usage among all college students.

CHAPTER III – METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify which student groups Black students perceive as needing food assistance, to explore how Black students' perceptions of students in need impacts their decision to utilize the on-campus food pantry at CSUDH, and to identify the circumstances that influence Black students' self-categorization. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and facilitated using a 10-question interview guide designed to answer the following research questions:

1. Which student groups do Black students perceive as needing food assistance and being users of the campus's food pantry?
2. How do Black students' perceptions of students who need food assistance influence their decision to utilize the on-campus food pantry?
3. What circumstances influence Black students' decision to self-categorize as needing and not needing food-assistance?

Research Design

This qualitative study driven by a grounded theory aimed to explore Black students' perceptions of food assistance and students in need (as it relates to food) and to identify how these perceptions influence on-campus food pantry utilization. Qualitative research methods are most appropriate when attempting to explore and understand the perceptions and behaviors of individuals or groups regarding a specific problem or issue. Additionally, qualitative research is frequently used when the research problem cannot be easily measured or explained using statistical methods; when the population or group being studied is small, nuanced, or cannot be easily identified; or when a complex, detailed understanding of the issue is needed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Lastly,

researchers commonly turn to qualitative approaches when they want to understand how participants address a problem in a particular context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Given the nature of the research topic and questions, the population being studied, and the setting in which this issue is occurring, a qualitative method was also chosen due to its associated data collection methods. Data from qualitative research can be collected via interviews while in the participants' natural setting or at the location where participants are experiencing the problem being studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Interviews used for qualitative approaches may take different formats; however, for this study, semi-structured interviews were used. Semi-structured interviews are a qualitative research approach that combines structured and unstructured interview styles to collect information on the participants' ideas, perceptions, or experiences. Semi-structured interviews are particularly suitable when the researcher wants to obtain rich explanations of complex phenomena and in-depth answers to questions about perspectives from the standpoint of the participant.

Grounded Theory Approach

The research questions addressed in this study aim to use Black students' perceptions to enhance and expand upon the existing theory of self-categorization. While many studies examine the issues of food or housing insecurity, very little is known about the psychological and sociological variables that inhibit the utilization of on-campus food pantries among Black college students (beyond the explanation of stigma, lack of knowledge, and institutional barriers). The most common theories that have been applied to the utilization of basic needs services are theories on planned behavior, social identity, and self-categorization; however, these theories tend to be applied to homeless and

housing-insecure groups as opposed to those experiencing hunger and food insecurity. (Christian & Abrams, 2003; Christian et al., 2003; Walter et al., 2015). Thus, the application of these theories to issues surrounding food insecurity, specifically among Black college students, is virtually non-existent.

Given the lack of research on this particular population and topic, as well as the need for a more in-depth understanding of the actions (or lack thereof) of Black students in relation to the uptake of food assistance resources, a qualitative research design rooted in grounded theory was incorporated in this study. Grounded theory explores the participants' perspectives and actions through the process of inductive research, to develop a theory within the context of the real world (Urquhart, 2013, as cited in Bytheway, 2018). According to Creswell (2013), a grounded theory approach is most appropriate when the researcher looks to move from describing an issue to developing a theory behind a process or action. This newly developed theory can ultimately be used to influence practices and provide a framework for further research (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, Creswell (2013) noted that researchers may also consider using grounded theory if there is no existing theory that can be used to explain a specific phenomenon; when an existing theory has been developed without data from a specific group of participants; or when an existing theory exists but does not address variables of interest to the researcher.

Site Selection

Data for this study was collected at CSUDH, a large, public, four-year, comprehensive university that primarily serves the South Bay area of Los Angeles County. California has the fifth-largest Black population in the country, with Los Angeles

County housing roughly one-third of all Blacks in the state (Reddy et al., 2022). Los Angeles County also has the largest food insecure population in the nation (Los Angeles Food Policy Council, n.d.). In a 2021 report published by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, titled, *Food Insecurity in Los Angeles County/Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic*, it was found that among adults in households with incomes less than 300% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), nearly 12% of Black residents lived in food-insecure households in 2018 before the pandemic. However, during the pandemic, between April and December 2020, this percentage increased to nearly 40%. After adjusting for household income and employment status, it was revealed that the college-age population (i.e., individuals ages 18 to 50 years) had significantly greater odds of experiencing food insecurity, compared to those ages 65 years and older from April 2020 to July 2020 (Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, 2021).

California State University, Dominguez Hills was selected because the campus serves a relatively large population of Black students. With an enrollment of approximately 2,000 Black students, CSUDH has the largest percentage of Black students of any CSU, making it the institution of choice for nearly a 10th of all Black students enrolled within the CSU System. Additionally, CSUDH was selected due to the basic need challenges that Black students reportedly face at CSUDH. Raw data from both the *Study of Student Basic Needs* and the *Study of Student Service Access and Basic Needs* revealed that in total, 25% of all Black respondents were enrolled at CSUDH at the time of these studies, which represented the largest percentage of Black participants from any CSU campus (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018; 2019). Furthermore, in 2020, findings from

the campus's basic needs survey revealed that 66.1% of Black students reported experiencing food insecurity – the highest rate among all racial and ethnic groups (McFadzen, 2020).

In the Fall 2018 semester, CSUDH implemented the Basic Needs Program – a campus-wide program initiative, funded by the CSU Chancellor's office to help alleviate food and housing insecurity. Per the CSUDH Basic Needs Program website, the mission of the Toro Food Pantry is to, "assist and support CSUDH students who may experience food challenges, such as skipping one or more meals per day…[and] to eliminate any food insecurities that students are experiencing on campus" (California State University, Dominguez Hills [CSUDH], n.d.). Currently enrolled undergraduate and graduate students can use the food pantry resources at no cost. The process is confidential and there are no restrictions on how many times a student can use the food pantry or its services (CSUDH, n.d.).

Participant Selection and Recruitment

The selection criteria for this study included currently enrolled CSUDH students who were 18 years of age or older, self-identified as Black, and self-reported as non-users of the CSUDH food pantry (i.e., Toro Food Pantry) due to the perceived lack of personal need for food assistance. To ensure perspectives from various types of Black students, no other criterium was established. To reduce the possibility of unintended coercion or undue influence, rather than personal solicitation of specific students, IRB-approved advertisements were posted across the CSUDH campus to recruit subjects from a broad base of students (Appendix A). However, since the impersonal nature of advertising can have the drawback of a low response rate, advertising was also accompanied by a more

targeted approach of engaging campus community gatekeepers in the recruitment process. Specifically, physical and digital flyers were sent to campus offices and departments to disseminate to students via email lists and social media platforms. This was done to avoid any personal solicitations by the Principal Investigator and allowed subjects interested in participation to initiate contact with the Principal Investigator thus ensuring voluntary participation.

Students who were interested in participating in the study were instructed to contact the Principal Investigator directly or use the link or QR code to access the pre-screening form (Appendix B). Eligible students were emailed a Calendly link that allowed them to schedule a Zoom interview with the Principal Investigator, along with an Information Letter (Appendix C) that explained the study. In total, ten participants, meeting the selection criteria, indicated an interest in participating in the study. Four of the participants were identified through the pre-screening form whereas, the other six participants expressed their interest in participating in the study via direct contact with the Principal Investigator. Each participant was emailed an Interview Informed Consent form (Appendix G) that explained the study in detail. Before proceeding with the study, the Principal Investigator explained all pertinent information (e.g., purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, incentive, confidentiality, etc.) and allowed participants ample opportunity to ask questions. Participants who expressed the wish to move forward with the research study were then instructed to digitally sign the consent form and email it back to the Principal Investigator. After the interview, participants were offered a $10 Amazon electronic gift card as an incentive.

Instrument and Data Collection

For this study, a five-item pre-screening questionnaire was created via Qualtrics to determine the eligibility of potential participants. The questionnaire included the following items: name, email, phone number, a multiple-choice item regarding eligibility criteria, and a Likert-scale type item that focused on personal need and campus food pantry usage. Students who were interested in participating in the study were instructed to contact the Principal Investigator directly or use the link or QR code to access the pre-screening questionnaire. Eligible students were emailed a Calendly link that allowed them to schedule a Zoom or in-person interview with the Principal Investigator, along with an Information Letter that explained the study, and a consent form.

Data collection consisted of the Principal Investigator conducting audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted between February 2022 and March 2022 and lasted no more than one hour. Four of the interviews were conducted via Zoom and the remaining six interviews were conducted face-to-face using the audio recording feature on Zoom. An interview guide consisting of ten, open-ended questions was created to address the research questions of this study. The first subset of questions focused on participants' general knowledge of the campus food pantry, while the second and third subsets of questions addressed participants' perception of personal need and the need of others. The last question asked participants for recommendations on how to better promote campus food pantry usage among Black students at CSUDH. During the interview, each participant was asked to share what they knew about the food pantry, their assessment of the personal need for food assistance, their opinions of student

populations they perceived to be in need of food assistance, and their thoughts regarding how CSUDH could better encourage Black students to use the campus food pantry.

Recorded audio from each of the interviews were transcribed by the Primary Investigator using intelligent or naturalized verbatim transcription and then coded using Delve, a qualitative data analysis program. Intelligent verbatim or naturalized verbatim transcription is a form of transcribing that involves the omission of some sentences or words that are unnecessary or irrelevant to the conversation for the purpose of improving readability while preserving the essence of what was said (Bucholtz, 2000; McMullin, 2021; Nascimento & Steinbruch, 2019). Thus, due to its semi-formal nature, intelligent verbatim transcription was the preferred method for this qualitative study.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis in qualitative research involves identifying and coding significant patterns in meanings within the data to develop themes. For this study, the Principal Investigator (PI) utilized the grounded theory method of analyzing qualitative data, therefore, coding was performed simultaneously with data collection using the constant comparative method, which involves making comparisons at each stage of data analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

The grounded theory method for analyzing data was selected as it is well-suited for studies that are guided by a grounded theory research approach or for studies with the goal of using qualitative data to develop a new theoretical framework or expand on an existing one (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The systematic method for coding qualitative data was developed by Corbin and Strauss (1990) and consists of three specific coding types used to analyze data: Initial Coding (Open Coding), Axial Coding (Focused Coding), and

Theoretical Coding (Selective Coding). Because the purpose of this study only aimed to expand upon a pre-existing theory and not generate a completely new one, Theoretical Coding was not performed. However, a summary of this stage of coding is included to provide a comprehensive overview of the grounded theory data analysis method.

Initial Coding (Open Coding)

The first step in grounded theory data analysis is Initial Coding, which was performed simultaneously with data collection. For this preliminary stage of data analysis, the Principal Investigator (PI) used *Delve* software to read through each interview transcript and label quotes with a specific code. During this stage, data were coded and compared for similarities and differences. The PI made sure to remain open to all theoretical possibilities and employed an inductive coding approach which required all codes to be identified and derived directly from the data (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Saldana, 2013). An inductive coding approach is helpful for "staying close to the data," and can help reduce bias and limit any preconceived notions regarding the data (Charmaz, 2006, p. 49).

Axial Coding (Focused Coding)

The next stage of grounded theory data analysis is Axial Coding, which expands on the analytical work from Initial Coding, and is the process of drawing connections between codes and grouping similarly coded data into several distinct categories (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Saldana, 2013). Once preliminary codes were developed in the Initial Coding stage, the PI conducted a second round of coding where the most significant codes were identified and condensed into several conceptual categories. For this stage of data analysis, the PI strived to create categories that

contained codes that best represented the essence of the data and thus, removed any redundant codes or codes that were deemed insignificant due to having minimal supporting data.

Theoretical Coding (Selective Coding)

The final stage in grounded theory data analysis is Theoretical Coding, which is the culminating step toward developing or enhancing a theoretical framework (Saldana, 2013). This stage includes the synthesizing of codes and categories derived from the Initial and Axial Coding stages into one single category to create or revise a theory (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Saldana, 2013). For this final stage of data analysis, categories that were poorly developed are removed, while other categories are changed and reorganized to develop the most accurate and descriptive analysis possible. Afterward, a single core category that captures the essence of the research is selected to become the basis for a new grounded theory.

Timeline

The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the CSUDH IRB approved this study on December 15, 2021, and December 20, 2021, respectively (Appendix F and G). After receiving IRB approval, a research participant solicitation email was sent by the Principal Investigator to several CSUDH offices and departments on January 18, 2022. On February 14, 2022, IRB-approved flyers (Appendix A) were posted on designated bulletin boards located in various places throughout the CSUDH campus. The first participant interview took place on February 4, 2022, and the last interview took place on March 3, 2022. Data from the interviews were transcribed

between March 2022 and May 2022. Analysis of the data took place during the summer between June 2022 and July 2022.

Positionality and Trustworthiness

Positionality

Unlike those who conduct quantitative research, qualitative researchers do not routinely rely on questionnaires, tests, or inventories to gather or analyze data (Creswell, 2014). Instead, a main characteristic of qualitative research is that the researcher is considered to be the primary instrument for data collection and interpretation (Creswell, 2014). This concept of the researcher as an instrument has prompted scholars to engage in reflexivity as a necessary means to self-assess one's position in relation to the study's context. Specifically, Creswell (2014) argues that those who engage in qualitative research should explicitly identify and explain how their own experiences and background may potentially shape the direction of the study and the interpretation of data. Thus, in conducting this study, it is necessary to articulate and disclose my positionality as the primary investigator in order to establish trustworthiness and maintain credibility.

To begin, it is worthwhile to note that the topic of this research study was unexpectedly brought to my attention by a senior administrator who was looking to find answers regarding the underutilization of free food resources by Black students. In my current professional role, I am responsible for supporting Black student success; however, I am not explicitly required to monitor or address the basic needs of Black students and therefore, I was largely unfamiliar with the current literature regarding the topic. Thus, having possessed no original interest or previous awareness of the research

topic, my approach to this research study was generally very open, which supported my overall ability to suspend prior judgments or preconceived notions while collecting and analyzing data. However, while completely unbiased research is ideal, it is virtually impossible, and I am aware that my identities and personal background may have influenced the way the data for this study was collected and analyzed.

For instance, I chose this research topic because given my racial background and professional roles as both a practitioner and scholar I felt a personal and professional obligation to ensure that Black students' voices are centered and heard within academia. As a Black higher education professional and scholar, most of my research interests and projects have focused on the experiences of Black people in the United States. Specifically, I take a particular interest in exploring the differences and nuances in experiences and perspectives among those within the Black community because Black people do not exist as a monolith. However, I understand that without scientifically documented evidence, many of the personal experiences or views of Black people are not perceived as valid, since anecdotal evidence is generally considered unreliable. Therefore, one of the underlining purposes of this qualitative study was to validate and credit the unique perspectives held by Black-identified college students.

While conducting this study, I was also very aware of my current professional roles and student status as they related to the research topic and the participants of the study. As the current Program Director for the Black Resource Center and adjunct instructor within the Africana Studies Department at CSUDH, I am very invested in and connected to the Black student population and as a result, also felt connected to my participants. Additionally, as a doctoral student conducting this research, I was generally

accepted by my participants as an insider, as all of them embraced me as a fellow student-peer. This shared or common identity as a student helped strengthen the connections I had with participants and made it easier to build rapport, allowing students to be more open and honest about their perceptions. As a result, my inner-group proximity to my participants can undoubtedly lead to both participant and researcher bias and influence the ways in which information is shared, collected, and analyzed.

Finally, while engaging in this research, I also considered and accounted for how my current and previous socioeconomic status could possibly influence the study. Currently, I identify as a food-secure, middle-class professional, however, as the daughter of a low-income, working-class mother who frequently utilizes the neighborhood food pantry, my background is still very relevant as it has become my adjacent identity. Although I have never personally experienced food insecurity or utilized a food pantry while in college, I was raised in a low-income, working-class household, in which my mother received government-sponsored assistance in the form of health care, supplemental nutrition assistance and at times, unemployment. Due to my dual identities, I have a raised awareness about food pantry utilization which could potentially lead to unintentional bias in data collection and analysis.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the trustworthiness of a study depends on the degree of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is the most important criterion and refers to the assessment of whether the research findings are correct and accurate (Connelly, 2016; Shenton, 2004). Transferability refers to applicability and is defined as the extent to which research findings can be applied to

other similar settings (Korstjens & Moster, 2018; Shenton, 2004). Dependability is used to measure the consistency of the research findings or the extent to which a study can be repeated using the same context and methods and produce similar results (Korstjens & Moster, 2018; Shenton, 2004). Lastly, confirmability is concerned with the neutrality of the research findings; interpretations of data are solely based on participants' responses and are free from the researcher's biases (Nowell et al., 2017).

In this study, credibility was ensured through member checking and peer review (also referred to as inter-coder reliability). Member checking refers to the validation of the accuracy of data by the participant, whereas peer review involves the critical assessment of the research project by colleagues (Shenton, 2004). At the conclusion of the data transcription process, participants were sent a copy of the interview transcription and were given 14 calendar days to review, clarify, or amend any remarks shared before the final publication of the results. Throughout the course of this study, a formal peer review was conducted by a capstone advisor who guided the research, analysis, writing, and other scholarly aspects of the study to ensure its quality.

CHAPTER IV – FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to identify which student groups Black students perceive as being of need of food assistance and to examine how Black students' perceptions of food-related need and students in need, influences their decision to utilize the on-campus food pantry at CSUDH. A grounded theory method was used to uncover new data that may expand on Turner's (1999) self-categorization theory and to contribute a different perspective on the factors that can influence campus food pantry utilization. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, and data was analyzed using initial and axial coding. This chapter presents the findings that emerged from the interviews with nine students from CSUDH who shared their opinions, experiences, and perceptions of need as it relates to Black students' on-campus food pantry usage. When referencing all participants, their self-selected pseudonym is used to protect their identity in this study.

Participant Demographics

The participants recruited for this study had to (1) be currently enrolled students, (2) be at least 18 years old, (3) self-identify as Black or African American, and (4) self-report as non-users of the on-campus food pantry due to the perceived lack of personal need for food assistance. Demographic questions were asked during the interview, which provided further insight into the participants and their identities, as seen in Table 1. Ten participants were originally recruited for this study however, after the conclusion of the interviews it was determined that one of the participants did not meet the eligibility criteria and was therefore removed from the study. Out of the nine participants, three (33.3%) identified as female, and six (66.6%) identified as male. Compared to the university's student demographics consisting of 35.6% males and 64.4% females, male

participants were overrepresented in the sample (CSUDH, n.d.). Class standing was determined by the number of completed units. The sample consisted of four juniors, three sophomores, one senior, and one freshman participant. All but one participant self-identified as middle-class, however, most participants (n = 7) were recipients of the Federal Pell Grant. Five participants identified as belonging to a two-parent household, whereas four participants identified as belonging to a single-parent household.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Participant	Sex	Academic Class Standing	Class-Level	Pell Eligibility	Household Type
Taylor	Female	Junior	Middle-Class	No	Two-Parent
Raven	Male	Junior	Middle-Class	Yes	Single-Parent
Payge	Female	Sophomore	Middle-Class	No	Two-Parent
Mike	Male	Junior	Middle-Class	Yes	Two-Parent
Jordan	Male	Sophomore	Middle-Class	Yes	Two-Parent
Jeffrey	Male	Senior	Working-Class	Yes	Single-Parent
Jean-Paul	Male	Freshman	Middle-Class	Yes	Two-Parent
Jasmine	Female	Sophomore	Middle-Class	Yes	Single-Parent
Eli	Male	Junior	Middle-Class	Yes	Single-Parent

Findings for Research Question One

The first research question that guided this study was: *Which student groups do Black students perceive as needing food assistance and being users of the campus's food pantry?* To answer this question, participants were asked to discuss who they believed

used the on-campus food pantry and students who they perceived as needing food assistance. From their responses, four main categories emerged: (1) financial challenges, (2) employment status, (3) food insecurity, and (4) non-traditional housing/living arrangements. These categories and their associated codes are highlighted in Table 2. These categories were ultimately used to identify the following student groups that Black students perceived as needing food assistance: low-/limited-income students, unemployed and overemployed students, food-insecure students, and students with non-traditional housing arrangements.

Table 2

Categories and Associated Codes Related to Research Question 1

Research Question	Category	Associated Codes
RQ1: *Which student groups do Black students perceive as needing food assistance and being users of the on-campus food pantry?*	Financial Challenges	• Low-income/Poverty • Financial struggles/constraints • One stream of income • Limited-to-no income • Financial aid ineligibility • Significant financial responsibilities
	Employment Status	• Do not have a job • Working several jobs • Working for food • Work to provide • Parents working constantly
	Food Insecurity	• Food insecurity • Not having much food • Missing or skipping meals • Lack of access to food • Lacking basic food supplies

Research Question	Category	Associated Codes
	Non-Traditional Housing/Living Arrangements	• Residents of the dorms • Students who live on-campus • Homeless students • Displaced students • Foster home

Category One: Financial Challenges

A recurrent theme that emerged from the interviews was the notion of financial challenges. When asked to identify characteristics of individuals who they perceived as needing food assistance or being users of the campus food pantry, Black students largely responded by describing individuals who were experiencing challenges related to their personal finances or household income. For example, nearly all the participants mentioned that low-income students, students with little-to-no money, students with substantial financial obligations, and students who did not receive financial aid were users the campus's food pantry.

As one student said frankly, "I say it's a matter of money. You know, it's college. A lot of people are broke; don't have money. So, this [the campus food-pantry] is a great chance for them to go get food" (Eli). Another student named Jasmine, listed the multiple characteristics that she believed were associated with users of the food pantry:

> Um, definitely those who come from of course, low-income housing, you know, low-income homes. Those who are probably unemployed; they don't have nothing to sustain their wallets. You know, you need money to pay for things, right? … [Also], students who can't probably apply for student loans or anything like that.

When asked who he thought used the food pantry, Mike responded, "people who don't really have that much money." He then added,

> For a person who needs it [food-assistance], I'd say like, obviously their finances aren't like that [in a good condition]. Like, they can't really get financial aid, or their parents just don't make enough money for them to like really eat.

Mike, also referenced having significant financial responsibilities as a characteristic of food pantry users:

> Yeah, definitely if someone were maybe [living] in a single parent household and there aren't two flows of income coming in, and they like, have to use a lot of money on the amenities of the home – so lights, electricity, the air conditioning, the heater and so on and so forth. So, I feel like that households with lower income would definitely benefit from using the food pantry.

Jordan shared a similar opinion regarding who he thought food pantry users were:

> So, students who may not have financial aid, students who may have had to pay out of pocket for their housing, and that's not to mention like their own amenities like their car. Like car payments, the gas, and so maybe students [who] have more financial commitments in regard to like, bills and stuff. … households with lower income would definitely benefit from using the [campus] food pantry.

Category Two: Employment Status

Another category that arose from the interviews was a students' or parents' employment status. Students cited both underemployment and overemployment as being traits of those who use or need the campus food pantry. Students who cited underemployment as being a trait of food pantry users, associated unemployment with the lack of financial means to buy food. Others, associated overemployment (i.e., working multiple different jobs) with not having enough time to buy and prepare food. In her interview, Jasmine explained the employment challenges that she associated with users of the food pantry:

> There's multiple different factors. You know, it's hard to find a job, it's hard to get [financial] assistance, it's hard to get a lot of things you know? … So, like, students who don't have a job, who don't have [financial] assistance from family.

Taylor also shared a similar assessment regarding those she perceived to be food pantry users:

> [Some] college students, like, they have to pay for the tuition because their parents can't do it. So, it's like damn, they have to pay out of pocket. So, like, they're working two, three jobs just so they can go to school, just for that semester. … Like, people who don't have it easy, they gotta like really [emphasizes *really*] work for food and stuff like that.

In his interview, Eli explained that the food pantry was beneficial to those students who worked, because he perceived them as having limited time to prepare meals.

> This [the campus food pantry] is a great chance for them [students] to go get food and sometimes, you know, some students work, they go to class, they don't have time to eat, they really don't have time to sleep. So, they can go in there in between time and get something to eat. You know, give them fuel so they can continue to work.

Similarly, Raven spoke about students having to work two or three jobs while in college or students whose parents work constantly, and therefore, do not have the time to shop for food or prepare meals.

Category Three: Food Insecurity

Students who experienced some degree of food insecurity were perceived by Black students as potential visitors of the campus's food pantry. Whereas some students specifically used the term "food insecure," or "food insecurity," others described the concept of food insecurity in their own words. For example, Payge commented on how food pantry users "lacked access to food" and mentioned that these students may also be in need of "basic food supplies," that were not being provided by their parents. In a similar fashion, Jean-Paul explained that students who go to the campus food pantry are those who do not have enough food or are still hungry after exhausting all resources. Specifically, he said:

> I believe it just comes down to input and output, I guess. If you're able to bring in enough food for yourself, then you probably won't go [to the campus food pantry] and students that do go [to the campus food pantry] will see themselves as needy if they don't have enough food. Like you know, things like that [food insecurity]; being hungry after you like use all your resources.

Raven, Mike, Jeffrey, and Jordan all used a version of the term "food insecurity," when describing the characteristics of those they perceived to use the food pantry. However, only Jeffrey and Jordan attempted to articulate what they believed defined a student experiencing food insecurity:

> Students who were like forced like to skip meals. … I think students who are missing meals and whatnot [use the food pantry] … Or even like students who were dealing with food security issues like at home as well (Jeffrey).

> Um, definitely students that are food insecure. Maybe, it also depends on their situation at home. If they have a lot of siblings or a lot of people in their household (Jordan).

Category Four: Non-Traditional Housing/Living Arrangements

Students who lived at home with parents or alone, off-campus, were not specifically identified as food pantry users by any of the participants. Instead, a variety of perspectives were expressed in regard to non-traditional housing and living arrangements. Both Jeffrey and Raven cited homeless and being "kicked-out," respectively. However, Jean-Paul stated that he perceived students who were, "forced to be more independent" as being in greater need of food assistance. He elaborated by associating independence with living in student-housing: "I feel like the students that are more [in need of food] are forced to be more independent … Students, that you know, dorm [or live in] student housing." In fact, a common view amongst interviewees was that students who frequented the on-campus food pantry were those living in the dorms or remained on campus all day. As Eli expressed:

> I think it's [the campus food pantry] mainly people at the dorms who don't have food and are looking for an easy access just to gain food. Or probably those who stay on campus all day, mainly. They don't really go home to do a lot studying and everything.

Taylor, who also believed that students who lived on-campus were users of the food pantry, explained that it may be due to the limited campus dining hours. When asked about users of the campus's food pantry, she said, "Maybe like people who live on-campus? Because you know, food services like Toro Fresh [and] all that isn't provided on the weekends and stuff like that."

Findings for Research Question Two

The second research question that guided this study was: *How do Black students' perceptions of students who need food assistance influence their decision to utilize the on-campus food pantry?* After participants discussed who they believed used the campus food pantry and identified types of students who they perceived as needing food assistance, participants were then asked to explain how their perceptions of students in need impacted their decision to use the campus food pantry. As outlined in Table 3, the majority of participants perceived students needing food assistance as those who were financially disadvantaged. Due to this perception, most participants responded that they would either severely limit or completely refrain from using the campus food pantry.

Table 3

Categories and Associated Codes Related to Research Question 2

Research Question	Category	Associated Codes
RQ2: *How do Black students' perceptions of students who need food assistance influence their decision to utilize the on-campus food pantry?*	Financially Disadvantaged	• Low-income; below middle-class • Little-to-no family support/assistance • Food insecure due to lack of income • Limited financial resources
	Little-to-no Usage	• Limit food pantry usage • Utilize less • Not use it at all • Holding back from using

Food Assistance is for the Financially Disadvantaged

The findings from research question one highlighted four main groups of students to whom Black students perceived as needing food assistance: low-/limited-income students, unemployed and overemployed students, food-insecure students, and students with non-traditional housing arrangements. However, the common, underlining factor that connected these groups of students was financial disadvantage. For example, although participants identified student groups other than low-income students as needing food assistance (i.e., unemployed and overemployed students, food-insecure students, and students with non-traditional housing arrangements), they frequently spoke about these groups in the context of financial hardships.

For instance, when talking about students who were experiencing food insecurity, participants commonly mentioned or associated finances with the ability to have access to

food. As one participant said, “I think students who are missing meals and whatnot [use the food pantry] because, they don’t, you know, have enough money for groceries and stuff like that” (Jeffrey). Similarly, when speaking about food-insecure students, Mike said, “They [food-insecure students] don’t really have that much food left in the fridge, or their card got declined.” Another student explained the association between food and money by simply stating, “I feel like money plays a big issue in getting food, so I think it [food insecurity] is really bad” (Payge).

Although not as prevalent, financial disadvantages were also associated with employment and living conditions. Jasmine suggested that students who need food assistance were probably unemployed, and stated, “they don’t have no nothing to sustain their wallets … you need money to pay for things right?” Whereas Payge explained, “[Some] students who don’t have enough money to really get food like that. … [they] have to work in order to provide for themselves.” She then added, “You know, like usually students who are who are living on campus, and I guess, who don’t have like the same financial income as others” (Payge).

Perceptions of Students Negatively Influences Pantry Usage

Based on their perceptions of students who they believed needed food assistance and used the food pantry, most participants decided to refrain from using the campus food pantry. In fact, most participants expressed their decision to not use the food pantry even after being informed that the food pantry was open to all student regardless of need. For example, Jordan responded that he would not use the food pantry due to others needing it more:

> Oh, no. With that information in mind, I don't think I'm more inclined to use it just because I know that there are people that need it more than me. I don't want to be greedy and take food that I don't need because I have food around the house, and I can fortunately pay for my own food if I want to go out to a restaurant. So, I want to save it [food assistance] for those who needed a lot more than I do.

Like Jordan, Jean-Paul also expressed his refusal to use the food pantry due to limited resources and other students he perceived as being more needy than himself:

> I'm less willing to use it just because I feel like there's a limited resource and I'd rather [the food] be allocated to people that are more needy than myself. I'm able to provide for myself pretty comfortably, so I feel like me going there is taking away from others that might need more. … I feel like knowing there's needier students that need the food pantry, I decide to just not use this food pantry because like I said all resources are limited.

Taylor said that knowing that there were students who were in greater need than her made her want to "hold back" on using the campus food pantry. She elaborated on this feeling:

> Because it's like, there's somebody else who's needy and you don't need that much; you can get this [food] on your own. There's people who can't get this [food] on their own. So why would you try to take that opportunity away from them?

Jeffery, who also declined to use the food pantry, echoed the same concept of taking an opportunity away from another student. In his interview, he explained that his usage of the campus's food pantry would be similar to applying for a scholarship:

> How I see everything … I just kind of feel like there's somebody that needs it more than me, because it's like, okay, I get my financial aid and stuff right? And, that covers all my school costs and whatnot…. I don't need for anything right now. So, it's like, why would I take that opportunity from somebody else who like, desperately needs that money?

Only two of the nine participants responded that they use the campus food pantry but said that they would limit the number of times they visited it. For example, Eli said:

> I'll definitely use it [the campus food pantry] more … [but] my usage of the food pantry won't be all the time. It'll probably be like probably once or three times a

> week if anything. I am aware that there are students that genuinely, really, need that [food assistance] though. So, I'm not gonna be like, 'Oh let me take this or that.' Like, no, I'll be courteous of people who genuinely need that [food assistance], who don't have anything to eat.

Likewise, Mike said, "I feel like I don't need that [food assistance]. I just want to give the opportunity for the kids who need it. … I'm gonna let them [students in need] use it more than me, because I'm financially straight."

Findings for Research Question Three

The third and final research question that guided this study was: *What circumstances influence Black students' decision to self-categorize as needing and not needing food assistance?* To answer this question, participants were asked a series of questions that highlighted their reasonings for not self-categorizing as a student who needed food assistance. In contrast, participants were also asked questions that highlighted the circumstances that would lead them to self-categorize as a student who needs food assistance. Based on their responses, two categories emerged: financial circumstances and food security status. These two categories and their associated codes are highlighted in Table 4. For most respondents, their financial circumstances and food security status played a significant role in influencing their decision to self-categorize as a student in need of food assistance or a student not in need of food assistance.

Table 4

Categories and Associated Codes Related to Research Question 2

Research Question	Category	Associated Codes for Needing Food Assistance	Associated Codes for Not Needing Food Assistance
RQ3: *What circumstances influence Black students' decision to self-categorize as needing and not needing food assistance?*	Financial Circumstances	• No money • Short on cash • Running low on funds • Insufficient funds • Parents' loss of income • Financial insecurity	• Financially literate (budgeting) • Stable income • Parents/family provide money
	Food Security Status	• No food • Out of food • Missing meals over an extended period of time	• Home cooked meals • Ability to grocery shop • Parents provide food • No food shortage • Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipient

Category One: Financial Circumstances

Participants' financial circumstances were largely cited as being a major factor that influenced their decision to self-categorize as either needing or not needing food assistance. For example, most participants generally perceived themselves as not needing food assistance due to being financially secure. Additionally, most participants said that they would consider themselves as needing food assistance if they or their parents were to experience financial difficulties. When asked if he considered himself to be a student in need of food assistance, Jordan said:

> I do not personally. I live in a two-parent household, and we have a very steady income and stable income. So, I'm blessed enough to have them always provide food for me. … they provide me the money to get food so I'm always in a position where I can or I can fulfill my hunger if need be.

Then, Jordan explained that for him to categorize himself as being a part of the student group that needs food assistance, one or both of his parents would have to lose their jobs.

The loss or reduction of personal or parental income was frequently referenced by participants. For example, Raven and Jordan both noted that if either them or their parents were short on cash, they would definitely use the campus food pantry. Similarly, Jean-Paul said:

> I feel like loss of income or less income would lead to that [needing food assistance]. I actually experienced that [loss of income] in more recent times … But, it didn't affect me to the point where I had to cut down on food. But, I felt like if there was a point where after all my obligations like bills and stuff, that I didn't have enough [money], then I would definitely go to the food pantry and seek that assistance. But that's not my situation right now, thankfully.

Like the others, Payge generally did not think of herself as needing food assistance. She disclosed that her parents opened a 529 college savings account for her and her sibling when they were born, and thus, had the financial means to afford a variety of college expenses including food:

> No, I don't consider myself [needing food assistance] because my parents … I have enough money; my parents have money for me too. … When I was born, me and my sister, they [my parents] did Morgan Stanley 529. So, there is two accounts and for my sister and me that they save money for me to go to college. So anytime I buy something on campus, regardless of what it is: food, clothes, anything [emphasizes *anything*], dorm stuff, anything, my parents will need the receipt and they will be reimbursed for because they've been saving up. And that in a sense makes me feel like I wouldn't need to use food pantry.

However, later during the interview she reflected upon her recent job loss and her father's recent retirement, which caused her to re-assess her current financial situation and degree of need. Nonetheless, despite changes in income, she still did not consider herself in need

of food assistance although she commented that the food pantry may still be beneficial to her:

> If somehow some way we [my parents and I] were running low on funds, or my family like, didn't have enough money or a loss of income, [which] that's kind of happening right now because I used to work and I used to provide for myself like, you know, basic needs like food, shoes, clothes, you know, like that right? … Right now, I'm not working … my dad, he's retired, but my mom, she doesn't have like, a high-income job. But they did save enough money for my college income but still … knowing that there's a food pantry available would be beneficial too.

Category Two: Food Security Status

The element of food security status was also a recurrent theme that frequently came up in discussions about need as it related to food. During the interviews, participants pinpointed the availability or access to food as being another major factor that influenced their decision to self-categorize as either needing or not needing food assistance. For instance, Eli stated that because he received home-cooked meals and could bring meals from home, he did not classify himself a student in need of food assistance. Likewise, Mike explained that because he had ability to go grocery shopping and had the time to cook, he did not need food assistance either:

> I go grocery shopping so, like, I really don't want to I want to go over there [to the campus food pantry] when I already have more groceries in my fridge and I'll just kind of meal plan that out. I also have time to cook too.

Like the others, Taylor also explained that the reason why she did not perceive herself as needing food assistance was because she had access to food at home:

> No, I don't [need food assistance]. … I have two parents in my household, so it's like, I'm able to get food from them. Like, and then if I'm working late, and my mom just so happens, to go to sleep like, okay, I'm just gonna get some food myself or I'll cook myself.

In his interview, Jeffrey responded the following when asked if he perceived himself as being a student in need of food assistance: “I would say no, because I already got food-stamps and whatnot as well.”

When participants were asked to identify circumstances that would influence them to use the food pantry, many participants talked about being severely food insecure. For example, Mike commented that in order for him to use the campus’s food pantry, he would have to be “absolutely out of food.” Similarly, Eli stated that he would use the campus’s food pantry if “there was no food at home.” Jasmine also echoed these sentiments and stated:

> And so, for me, personally, if I really [emphasizes *really*] needed help, you know, if I didn’t have dinner since last week or if I am coming into the [Black Resource] Center desperately trying to find some food, that is something [a circumstance] in which I would need the food pantry.

CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify which student groups Black students perceive as needing food assistance, to explore how Black students' perceptions of students in need impacts their decision to utilize the on-campus food pantry at CSUDH, and to identify the circumstances that influence Black students' self-categorization. Three research questions were addressed in this study:

1. Which student groups do Black students perceive as needing food assistance and being users of the campus's food pantry?
2. How do Black students' perceptions of students who need food assistance influence their decision to utilize the on-campus food pantry?
3. What circumstances influence Black students' decision to self-categorize as needing and not needing food-assistance?

Regarding research question one, interview responses revealed that Black students generally perceived the following students as needing food assistance and being users of the campus's food pantry: low-income students, unemployed or overemployed students, students experiencing food insecurity, and students with non-traditional housing or experiencing homelessness. These perceptions can most likely be due to the participants' general knowledge of the purpose of food pantries and who they serve, and their understanding of the relationship between income, homelessness, and food insecurity. Additionally, participants' perceptions could have also been influenced by the marketing of the campus's food pantry. Currently, the campus's food pantry is housed under the university's Basic Needs Program which markets the campus's food pantry as resource for "students in need" (CSUDH, n.d.).

Employment status was a unique factor, as participants identified both unemployed (i.e., having no job) and overemployed (i.e., having multiple jobs) students as needing food assistance and being users of the campus's food pantry. It was apparent that participants believed that being unemployed meant that an individual did not have enough money to purchase food and therefore, had to use the campus's food pantry. However, it also seemed that participants believed that holding multiple jobs was a sign of financial instability as well. Being overemployed frequently describes individuals who must work several low-paying jobs just to afford basic expenses. This is a common narrative associated with those who experience poverty and could explain why Black students associated overemployment with needing food assistance and food pantry usage.

Findings for research question two showed that Black students generally perceived those needing food assistance as individuals experiencing financial hardships commonly due to a lack of or limited source of income. This perception negatively influenced their decision to use the campus's food pantry since all participants reported being financially secure and expressed having the financial wherewithal to afford and purchase food. Most participants referenced having multiple sources of income used to cover their food expenses, including receiving financial support from their families, employment income, and financial aid.

Interestingly, all participants except for one, self-identified as middle-class; however, all but two participants were Pell Grant eligible. The Pell Grant is the largest federal grant program for undergraduate students and is designed to assist students from low-income households who display financial need. To qualify for a Pell Grant, a student must demonstrate exceptional financial need by having an Expected Family Contribution

(EFC) significantly less than their Cost of Attendance (COA). Historically, Pell Grant eligibility has been used as an objective marker by higher education professionals to assess the prevalence and risk of food insecurity among college and university students. However, the fact that the majority of participants who identified themselves as middle-class were Pell-eligible, underscores the subjectivity in assessing need for food assistance and highlights the differences in perceptions between higher education professionals and Black students regarding financial need and socioeconomic status. This further complicates the assessment and perception of "need" as a concept that Black students construct relative to their understanding of class and perceptions of those for whom the food pantry is intended.

Despite their own financial limitations, participants perceived the campus's food pantry as a resource intended for students who demonstrated greater need than themselves. This perception affected participants' inclination to use the campus's food pantry. Participants believed that it would be inappropriate for them to use the campus's food pantry given their financial resources and personal situations, and thus, felt a moral obligation to limit or completely refrain from using the campus's food pantry.

Lastly, findings for research question three revealed that financial circumstances and food security status were two main factors that influenced Black students' self-categorization. All participants self-categorized as a student not in need of the campus's food pantry because they perceived themselves to be financial stable and food secure. However, participants explained that if their financial situation or food-security status were to change (i.e., loss of income, insufficient funds, missing meals, running out of food), then they would self-categorize as a student in need of food assistance, and thus

utilize the campus's food pantry. When explaining the financial and food circumstances that would have to occur for them to self-categorize as users of the campus's food pantry, only a couple of participants mentioned using the campus's food pantry for less dire situations such as forgetting their wallet or grabbing a snack between classes. On the other hand, most participants frequently explained having to experience very severe circumstances such as being completely out of food or missing dinner for a week. These explanations shed light on the circumstances that Black students perceive as being appropriate for use of the food pantry. Possessing such a limited scope of appropriate circumstances may explain why many other Black students choose not to use the campus's food pantry.

Implications for Practice

The results of this study provided insight to who Black students perceived as needing food assistance and how Black students perceived the CSUDH campus food pantry. Based on these findings, participants generally believed that the campus's food pantry was a resource for students who demonstrated need greater than themselves. Due to this perception, participants refused or severely limited their use of the campus's food pantry, even though they could have benefited from its resources. The perceptions held by participants regarding who the campus's food pantry is intended for may have come from campus marketing. These messages may have indirectly deterred Black students from using the campus's food pantry by communicating that the resource is reserved for students experiencing poverty.

For example, because the CSUDH campus food pantry is currently being presented as a resource for students in need and is commonly promoted alongside

CalFresh (the USDA-funded supplemental nutrition assistance program [SNAP] in the state of California for low-income households), students may be under the impression that the campus's food pantry is only for needy, low-income students. Therefore, when asked how the campus could better promote the food pantry to Black students, several participants responded that the campus should engage in more inclusive marketing or promote the campus's food pantry in such a way that all students are encouraged to use the campus's food pantry regardless of financial or food security status.

Additionally, respondents were also under the impression that the campus's food pantry did not have enough food to cater to everyone, perhaps due to the campus's promotional videos and other marketing material asking the campus community for donations and support. This messaging may have shaped the perception that the campus's food pantry should be reserved for students in greater need. Thus, when asked how the campus could increase the number of Black students who frequent the on-campus food pantry, several participants suggested marketing that demonstrated that there is enough food for all students. Although the CSUDH on-campus food pantry does struggle with limited resources and remains in a constant state of needing certain items to fill the pantry, reaching Black students many require a shift in overall messaging and marketing.

Moving forward, basic needs staff at CSUDH may want to disassociate the campus's food pantry from CalFresh and advertise the pantry under a different name (i.e., campus market, snack bar, grab-and-go) and as a standalone resource. Doing so may change the perception that the campus's food pantry is only for low-income students experiencing extenuating circumstances and may also limit the negative stigmas that are generally associated with food pantries. Furthermore, the basic needs staff may need to

be more strategic about how they ask for pantry donations. Highly publicized marketing materials geared towards donors that paint the campus's food pantry as needing supplies or characterize food pantry users as demonstrating extreme need, may deter potential students if they do not identify as such. Therefore, basic needs staff may want to consider launching a new marketing campaign that highlights the diversity of campus food pantry users in order to change the perception that the campus's food pantry is only for impoverished students in dire need of food.

The findings from this study demonstrate how understanding the perceptions of Black students could potentially help higher education professionals improve their outreach and service delivery to their Black student population. Although the following implications outlined within this section may only be relevant to CSUDH, these implications nonetheless highlight broader issues related to outreach and methods of delivery for on-campus food pantry providers to consider. Furthermore, results of this study emphasize the need for basic need providers to consider their practices from the perspective of Black students who tend to experience higher rates of food insecurity and may greatly benefit from food assistance.

Limitations & Recommendations for Future Research

Although this study provides a new perspective on the factors that influence campus food pantry utilization among Black college students, this research is not without limitations. First, findings from this study cannot be generalizable due to a small sample size. Specifically, findings within this study cannot be generalized to Black college students across the nation as the sample is limited only to a sample of students from one institution. Nor can the findings be generalized to the university's total student population

given the study's inclusion of only Black-identified students and exclusion of students from other racial groups. Additionally, in contrast to campus enrollment trends which have historically shown that Black women enroll at higher rates than Black men, the sample size used in this study includes an overrepresentation of Black male-identified students.

Secondly, this study only relied on the recruitment of participants who were willing to discuss their understanding of need, their perception of their campus's food pantry and how these factors have impacted their decision to not use the campus food pantry. Therefore, the selection criteria inevitably left out students who were unable or unwilling to participate, were uncomfortable discussing their thoughts, or identified as a student who has used the campus's food pantry in the past.

Lastly, it is also possible that data could be skewed towards those Black students who had frequently interacted with the researcher via visiting the Black Resource Center and thus, wanted to help. Nevertheless, given that no study has examined Black students' perspectives of on-campus food pantries and the impact of self-categorizing on campus food pantry utilization, these findings are a valuable contribution to the study of food insecurity and campus food assistance programs.

To advance this study, future research should focus on Black students' understanding of class consciousness or their awareness of one's social and economic class relative to others. Since many of the participants self-identified as middle-class despite their Pell Grant eligibility status, additional research is needed to assess Black students' understanding of socioeconomic status and to reveal new knowledge related to understanding their underutilization of campus food pantries. Future research should also

investigate the racial dynamics and the impact of self-categorization on-campus food pantry usage. Currently, no study known to the Principal Investigator explores the association between race or self-categorization and on-campus food pantry utilization, therefore, additional research is needed in order to fill the gap in literature that exists.

Conclusion

First-generation Black students have the highest levels of food insecurity within the CSU System; however, campus food pantries are not reaching these students for reasons other than social stigma, lack of knowledge about resources, and institutional barriers. Understanding why Black students refrain from utilizing the campus food pantry is critical to alleviating food insecurity within the population. This study contributes a new narrative on the factors and perceptions that influence campus food pantry utilization among Black college students and offers several recommendations for implementing shifts in messaging and marketing which could be critical to increasing the number of Black students that utilize the campus food pantry and ultimately reduce food insecurity. In addition to considering the perceptions of students who use the campus food pantry, basic needs staff also need to consider those students who are in need of food assistance and choose not to utilize the food pantry. By ascribing to this view, Black, non-campus pantry users become potential clients whose needs must also be met.

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APPENDIX A – Recruitment Flyer

WHY AREN'T BLACK STUDENTS USING THE FOOD PANTRY?

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED!

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine how Black students' perceptions of needier students impacts their decision-making around utilizing on-campus food pantries.

Eligibility

- Black/African American
- 18+ years or older
- Currently enrolled CSUDH student
- Has never used the Toro Food Pantry

Procedure

- Participate in a 60-minute (or less), audio-recorded Zoom interview

Compensation

- Each participant will receive a $10 Amazon eGift card upon completion of the study

Catherine Jermany
Principle Investigator

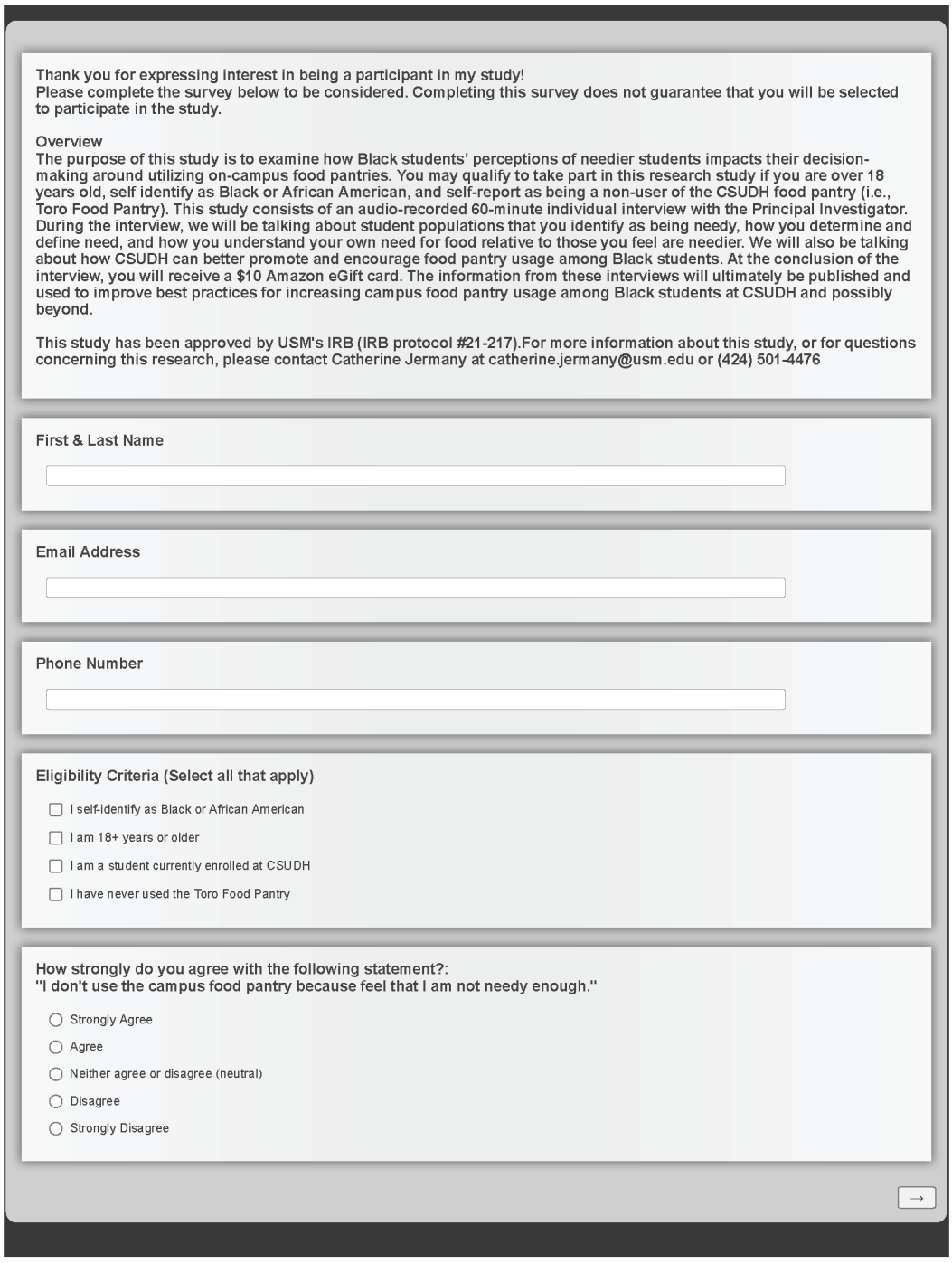
For questions/concerns:
Catherine.Jermany@usm.edu
(424) 501-4476

Want to Participate?

Scan the QR Code →
or, follow the link below:
https://bit.ly/3Hr5XPy

This study has been approved by USM's IRB.
IRB PROTOCOL #21-217

APPENDIX B – Pre-Screening Survey



Thank you for expressing interest in being a participant in my study!
Please complete the survey below to be considered. Completing this survey does not guarantee that you will be selected to participate in the study.

Overview
The purpose of this study is to examine how Black students' perceptions of needier students impacts their decision-making around utilizing on-campus food pantries. You may qualify to take part in this research study if you are over 18 years old, self identify as Black or African American, and self-report as being a non-user of the CSUDH food pantry (i.e., Toro Food Pantry). This study consists of an audio-recorded 60-minute individual interview with the Principal Investigator. During the interview, we will be talking about student populations that you identify as being needy, how you determine and define need, and how you understand your own need for food relative to those you feel are needier. We will also be talking about how CSUDH can better promote and encourage food pantry usage among Black students. At the conclusion of the interview, you will receive a $10 Amazon eGift card. The information from these interviews will ultimately be published and used to improve best practices for increasing campus food pantry usage among Black students at CSUDH and possibly beyond.

This study has been approved by USM's IRB (IRB protocol #21-217).For more information about this study, or for questions concerning this research, please contact Catherine Jermany at catherine.jermany@usm.edu or (424) 501-4476

First & Last Name

Email Address

Phone Number

Eligibility Criteria (Select all that apply)

- [ ] I self-identify as Black or African American
- [ ] I am 18+ years or older
- [ ] I am a student currently enrolled at CSUDH
- [ ] I have never used the Toro Food Pantry

How strongly do you agree with the following statement?:
"I don't use the campus food pantry because feel that I am not needy enough."

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Neither agree or disagree (neutral)
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

→

APPENDIX C – Information Letter

The University of Southern Mississippi (USM)
118 College Drive
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001

INFORMATION LETTER

Project Title	I'm Not That Needy: The Impact of Black Students' Perceptions of Need on Campus Food Pantry Utilization		
Principal Investigator	Catherine Jermany, M.S. College of Education and Human Sciences School of Education, Higher Education Administration		
Capstone Faculty Advisor	Dr. Holly Foster (Holly.Foster@usm.edu)		
Email	Catherine.Jermany@usm.edu	**Phone Number**	(424) 501-4476
Approval	This study has been approved by USM's IRB (IRB protocol #21-217).		

SUMMARY OF STUDY

The purpose of this research study is to examine how Black students' perceptions of needier students impacts their decision-making around utilizing on-campus food pantries. You may qualify to take part in this research study if you are over 18 years old, self-identify as Black or African American, and self-report as non-users of the CSUDH food pantry (i.e., Toro Food Pantry). This study consists of an audio-recorded 60-minute individual interview with the Principal Investigator. During the individual interview, you will be asked to share your thoughts about personal need for food assistance, and CSUDH food pantry usage. In all, participating in this study will take approximately 60 minutes.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

This study is being done to better understand and address the factors that determine students' on-campus pantry utilization, with specific attention paid to Black students at CSUDH, who are at higher risk of being food insecure. The researcher is interested in exploring which student populations Black students perceive as being the neediest and how Black students determine personal need for food assistance relative to those they perceive as needier.

WHY ONLY BLACK STUDENTS AT CSUDH?

The essential reason for including only Black CSUDH students in this study is that significant, unintentional harms to Black students' academic well-being may result (or continue) if their issues are not focused on specifically. At CSUDH, 66.1% of Black students reported experiencing food insecurity – the highest rate among all racial and ethnic groups (McFadzen, 2020). Research suggests that food insecurity can be linked to lower academic achievement, which thereby may perpetuate the achievement gap between Black students and their non-Black peers. Therefore, research is needed to better understand and address the factors that determine students' pantry utilization, specifically with regards to Black students who are at higher risk of being food insecure. These efforts will be critical to increasing campus pantry utilization among food-insecure students and may lead to increased academic performance, retention, and graduation rates of Black students at CSUDH. Thus, if Black/African American students are not included in this research study, the findings that stem from this research may not be reflective of Black students' lived experiences, therefore rendering implications and best practices unapplicable.

With an enrollment of approximately 2,000 Black students, California State University, Dominguez has the largest percentage of Black/ African American students of any CSU, making it the institution of choice for nearly a 10th of all Black students enrolled within the CSU System. Furthermore, the raw data from the qualitative sample used for the *Study of Student Basic Needs* (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018) and the *Study of Student Service Access and Basic Needs* (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2019), revealed that 25% of **all** Black respondents were enrolled at CSUDH at the time of the studies – the largest percentage of all CSU campuses.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY?

Participation of this study includes a 60-minute audio-recorded individual interview. The recording **is mandatory** to accurately record the information you provide and will be used for transcription purposes only. During the interview, the researcher will ask you questions about your opinions on need as it relates to food assistance and why you do not use the campus food pantry at CSUDH.

WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT CAN I EXPECT FROM PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

The study has minimal risk, meaning no more risk than adults would encounter in their typical, daily activities. However, there may be risks of coercion and undue influence, emotional harm, possible loss of confidentiality, and misrepresentation and/or misinterpretation associated with participating in a research study. To minimize these risks, the following measures will be put in place:

- You will be reminded that participation in the study completely voluntary and your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with the researcher or California State University, Dominguez Hills.
- Financial compensation has been limited to $10.00 Amazon eGift card to minimize the risk of any undue influence or coercion.
- Concluding the study, you will receive an email thanking you for your participation, with links to CSUDH's Psychological Services Office and Basic Needs Office.
- You will be provided the opportunity to choose your own pseudonym. If you do not choose a pseudonym, one will be assigned to you.
- Transcripts will be de-identified and additional participant data will be stored on a single password protected laptop computer.
- You will have 14 calendar days to from the day you receive the email to review the interview transcript and to clarify, expand on, amend, or remove any remarks shared before the final publication of results.

WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

While there are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study, results may help higher education, student affairs practitioners better understand Black students' perceptions of need as it relates to campus pantry usage.

WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

After completing the study, you will be compensated with a $10.00 Amazon eGift card. If you are unwilling or unable to complete the study, **you will not** receive the $10.00 Amazon eGift card.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?

The study is over when you have completed the individual interview. However, you have the right to choose not to participate in any study activity or completely withdraw from continued participation at any

point in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with the researcher or California State University, Dominguez Hills.

HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?

There can never be an absolute guarantee that your confidentiality will be protected. However, the following measures will be taken to minimize the risk of a breach in confidentiality:

- You will be provided the opportunity to choose your own pseudonym (i.e., a fake name). If you do not choose a pseudonym, one will be assigned to you by the Principal Investigator at the beginning of the study.
- All digital data, including (but not limited to) Informed Consent Letters (PDF), audio recordings, and interview transcriptions will be stored on the Principal Investigator's personal, password protected laptop computer.
- All hard-copies and physical materials and/or documents will be stored in a locked file cabinet at the Principal Investigator's personal residence.
- There will be one (1) participant master list with real names and associated pseudonyms (i.e., a fake names). Only the Principal Investigator will have access to this list, and it will be stored on Principal Investigator's personal, password protected laptop computer.
- After three (3) years, the Principal Investigator will destroy all data files.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?

Results from this study will be used to improve best practices for increasing campus food pantry usage among Black students experiencing food insecurity at CSUDH.

WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

This research study and this consent form have been reviewed by USM's Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research studies involving human subjects follow federal regulations. **This study has been approved by USM's IRB (IRB protocol #21-217).**

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding the research or your role as a participant in this study, please contact Catherine Jermany at Catherine.Jermany@usm.edu, (424) 501-4476. If at any time you have comments or concerns regarding the conduct of the research or questions about your rights as a research subject, you should contact The University of Southern Mississippi, Institutional Review Board. The phone number for the IRB is (601) 266-5997, or you can write to the IRB at 118 College Drive #5125, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001.

APPENDIX D – Participant Consent Form

The University of Southern Mississippi (USM)
118 College Drive
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001

INTERVIEW INFORMED CONSENT

Project Title	I'm Not That Needy: The Impact of Black Students' Perceptions of Need on Campus Food Pantry Utilization		
Principal Investigator	Catherine Jermany, M.S. College of Education and Human Sciences School of Education, Higher Education Administration		
Capstone Faculty Advisor	Dr. Holly Foster (Holly.Foster@usm.edu)		
Email	Catherine.Jermany@USM.edu	**Phone Number**	(424) 501-4476

WHAT IS INFORMED CONSENT?

The purpose of informed consent is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the information on this form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what you will be asked you to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a participant, and anything else about the study or the information on this form that is not clear. When the Principal Investigator has answered all your questions, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process of asking questions and receiving clarification is called "informed consent." **At the conclusion of the informed consent process, you will be emailed a signed copy of this document. Please retain it for your personal records.**

SUMMARY OF STUDY

The purpose of this research study is to examine how Black students' perceptions of needier students impacts their decision-making around utilizing on-campus food pantries. You may qualify to take part in this research study if you are over 18 years old, self-identify as Black or African American, and self-report as non-users of the CSUDH food pantry (i.e., Toro Food Pantry). This study consists of an audio-recorded 60-minute individual interview with the Principal Investigator. During the individual interview, you will be asked to share your thoughts about personal need for food assistance, and CSUDH food pantry usage. In all, participating in this study will take approximately 60 minutes.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

This study is being done to better understand and address the factors that determine students' on-campus pantry utilization, with specific attention paid to Black students at CSUDH, who are at higher risk of being food insecure. The researcher is interested in exploring which student populations Black students perceive as being the neediest and how Black students determine personal need for food assistance relative to those they perceive as needier.

WHY ONLY BLACK STUDENTS AT CSUDH?

The essential reason for including only Black CSUDH students in this study is that significant, unintentional harms to Black students' academic well-being may result (or continue) if their issues are not focused on specifically. At CSUDH, 66.1% of Black students reported experiencing food insecurity – the highest rate among all racial and ethnic groups (McFadzen, 2020). Research suggests that food insecurity can be linked to lower academic achievement, which thereby may perpetuate the achievement gap between Black students and their non-Black peers. Therefore, research is needed to better understand and

address the factors that determine students' pantry utilization, specifically with regards to Black students who are at higher risk of being food insecure. These efforts will be critical to increasing campus pantry utilization among food-insecure students and may lead to increased academic performance, retention, and graduation rates of Black students at CSUDH. Thus, if Black/African American students are not included in this research study, the findings that stem from this research may not be reflective of Black students' lived experiences, therefore rendering implications and best practices unapplicable.

With an enrollment of approximately 2,000 Black students, California State University, Dominguez has the largest percentage of Black/ African American students of any CSU, making it the institution of choice for nearly a 10th of all Black students enrolled within the CSU System. Furthermore, the raw data from the qualitative sample used for the *Study of Student Basic Needs* (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018) and the *Study of Student Service Access and Basic Needs* (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2019), revealed that 25% of **all** Black respondents were enrolled at CSUDH at the time of the studies – the largest percentage of all CSU campuses.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY?

Participation of this study includes a 60-minute audio-recorded individual interview. The recording **is mandatory** to accurately record the information you provide and will be used for transcription purposes only. During the interview, the researcher will ask you questions about your opinions on need as it relates to food assistance and why you do not use the campus food pantry at CSUDH.

WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT CAN I EXPECT FROM PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

The study has minimal risk, meaning no more risk than adults would encounter in their typical, daily activities. However, there may be risks of coercion and undue influence, emotional harm, possible loss of confidentiality, and misrepresentation and/or misinterpretation associated with participating in a research study. To minimize these risks, the following measures will be put in place:

- You will be reminded that participation in the study completely voluntary and your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with the researcher or California State University, Dominguez Hills.
- Financial compensation has been limited to $10.00 Amazon eGift card to minimize the risk of any undue influence or coercion.
- Concluding the study, you will receive an email thanking you for your participation, with links to CSUDH's Psychological Services Office and Basic Needs Office.
- You will be provided the opportunity to choose your own pseudonym. If you do not choose a pseudonym, one will be assigned to you.
- Transcripts will be de-identified and additional participant data will be stored on a single password protected laptop computer.
- You will have 14 calendar days to from the day you receive the email to review the interview transcript and to clarify, expand on, amend, or remove any remarks shared before the final publication of results.

WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

While there are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study, results may help higher education, student affairs practitioners better understand Black students' perceptions of need as it relates to campus pantry usage.

WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

After completing the study, you will be compensated with a $10.00 Amazon eGift card. If you are unwilling or unable to complete the study, **you will not** receive the $10.00 Amazon eGift card.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?

The study is over when you have completed the individual interview. However, you have the right to choose not to participate in any study activity or completely withdraw from continued participation at any point in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with the researcher or California State University, Dominguez Hills.

HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?

There can never be an absolute guarantee that your confidentiality will be protected. However, the following measures will be taken to minimize the risk of a breach in confidentiality:

- You will be provided the opportunity to choose your own pseudonym (i.e., a fake name). If you do not choose a pseudonym, one will be assigned to you by the Principal Investigator at the beginning of the study.
- All digital data, including (but not limited to) Informed Consent Letters (PDF), audio recordings, and interview transcriptions will be stored on the Principal Investigator's personal, password protected laptop computer.
- All hard-copies and physical materials and/or documents will be stored in a locked file cabinet at the Principal Investigator's personal residence.
- There will be one (1) participant master list with real names and associated pseudonyms (i.e., a fake names). Only the Principal Investigator will have access to this list, and it will be stored on Principal Investigator's personal, password protected laptop computer.
- After three (3) years, the Principal Investigator will destroy all data files.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?

Results from this study will be used to improve best practices for increasing campus food pantry usage among Black students experiencing food insecurity at CSUDH.

WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

This research study and this consent form have been reviewed by USM's Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research studies involving human subjects follow federal regulations.

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding the research or your role as a participant in this study, please contact Catherine Jermany at Catherine.Jermany@usm.edu, (424) 501-4476. If at any time you have comments or concerns regarding the conduct of the research or questions about your rights as a research subject, you should contact The University of Southern Mississippi, Institutional Review Board. The phone number for the IRB is (601) 266-5997, or you can write to the IRB at 118 College Drive #5125, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH STUDY

I hereby consent to participate in this research study. All research procedures and their purpose were explained to me, and I had the opportunity to ask questions about both the procedures and their purpose. I received information about all expected benefits, risks, inconveniences, or discomforts, and I had ample opportunity to ask questions about them. I understand that my participation in the project is completely voluntary and that I may withdraw from the project at any time without penalty, prejudice, or loss of benefits. I understand that the researcher may withdraw me from the study at their professional discretion. I understand the extent to which my personal information will be kept confidential, and that de-identifiable data may be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research without additional informed consent from me. As the research proceeds, I understand that any new information that emerges and that might be relevant to my willingness to continue my participation will be provided to me.

AUTHORIZATION OF THE USE OF AUDIO RECORDING

I understand that I will be audio recorded during the interview. I understand that recordings will be used for data analysis, conference presentations, and other educational purposes. I understand that audio recording is a mandatory part of this research study however, if I decide that I do not wish to be recorded at any point, I will no longer be able to participate in the research study.

☐ **YES**, I authorize the use of audio recording as described.

☐ **NO**, I do not authorize the use of audio recording as described.

AUTHORIZATION OF THE USE OF DIRECT QUOTES

I understand that the interview will be recorded and transcribed. I understand that the researcher may use my words, direct quotes, or other excerpts made by me in this study to be included in presentations, publications, other academic outlets related to this research. I understand that any interview content will be de-identified however, confidentiality cannot be fully guaranteed and that I may be able to be re-associated with the data at a later time. I understand that I will be sent notes, transcripts, or other data collected during the research pertaining to my participation to review for accuracy.

☐ **YES**, I authorize the researcher to use excerpts such as direct quotes from the interview in their research.

☐ **NO**, I do not authorize the researcher to use excerpts such as direct quotes from the interview in their research.

Participant's Name (Print): _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty.

APPENDIX E – Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Name of Interviewee:

Interviewee Pseudonym:

Date:

Name of Interviewer: Catherine Jermany (Principal Investigator)

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me about your perceptions of need as it relates to campus food pantry usage. As you may already know, 66.1% of Black students at California State University, Dominguez Hills (CSUDH) reported experiencing food insecurity, however, food pantry resources available are underutilized among Black students at CSUDH. Today, we will be talking about student populations that you identify as being needy, how you determine and define need, and how you understand your own need for food relative to those you feel are in greater need of food. We will also be talking about how CSUDH can better promote and encourage food pantry usage among Black students.

This interview is a part of a research study that I am conducting for my capstone project, a requirement for my doctoral degree. As the Principal Investigator, my goal is to better understand how your understanding of need has impacted your decision to not use the campus food pantry. The information from these interviews will ultimately be published and used to improve best practices for increasing campus food pantry usage among Black students at CSUDH. While my findings will be published, it is important to protect your confidentiality, therefore, none of your personal information will be shared and only pseudonyms will be used in any publications.

As a reminder, this interview should take no more than an hour and is voluntary. All information discussed today, including your name will be kept confidential. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time and your answers (with pseudonyms) will only be seen by myself and my capstone advisor. Furthermore, your responses will not impact any services you receive from CSUDH or your relationship with me (the researcher). At the conclusion of this interview, you will receive a $10 Amazon eGift card.

Are you ready to begin?

CAMPUS FOOD PANTRY

1. Please share what you know about the campus food pantry.
2. What type of students do you think use the campus food pantry?
3. The campus food pantry is open for all students regardless of food-security status. Knowing this, are you more willing to use it? Why or why not?

PERCEPTIONS OF NEED (OTHERS)

4. What is the difference between a student who needs the campus food pantry and someone who doesn't?
5. In your opinion, what circumstances would justify someone using the campus food pantry?

PERCEPTIONS OF NEED (PERSONAL)

6. Do you consider yourself to be a student in need of food-assistance? Why or why not?
7. Under what circumstances would you be more likely to use the campus food pantry?
8. Do you think there are students who have a greater need for food than you? If so, who?
9. Does knowing that there are more needy students impact your decision to use the campus food pantry? Why or why not?

RECOMMENDATIONS

10. In your opinion, how can CSUDH better promote campus food pantry usage among Black students like yourself (i.e., those who do not use the pantry)?

APPENDIX F – CSUDH IRB Approval Letter

CSUDH Institutional Review Board
for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

Date: **December 20, 2021**

To: **Catherine Jermany, Holly Foster**
CC: File

From: **Judith Aguirre, Research Compliance Officer**
CSUDH Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Subject: **#22-086 – "I'm Not that Needy: The Impact of Black Students' Perception of Need on Campus Food Pantry Utilization"**

The IRB at California State University, Dominguez Hills is pleased to inform you that the university will rely on the approval of The University of Southern Mississippi.

Procedural changes or amendments must be reported to the IRB and no changes may be made without IRB approval except to eliminate apparent immediate hazards. Please notify the Office of Graduate Studies and Research (a) if there are any adverse events that result from your study, and (b) when your study is completed.

If you have any questions, you may contact the Office of Graduate Studies and Research at (310) 243-2136.

Thank you.

Subject recruitment and data collection may not be initiated prior to formal written approval from the IRB Human Subjects Committee

APPENDIX G – USM IRB Approval Letter

Office *of*
Research Integrity

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

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NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

The project below has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University Policy to ensure:

- The risks to subjects are minimized and reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered involving risks to subjects must be reported immediately. Problems should be reported to ORI via the Incident submission on InfoEd IRB.
- The period of approval is twelve months. An application for renewal must be submitted for projects exceeding twelve months.

PROTOCOL NUMBER:	21-217
PROJECT TITLE:	I'm Not That Needy: The Impact of Black Students' Perceptions of Need on Campus Food Pantry Utilization
SCHOOL/PROGRAM	Educational Research & Adminstration
RESEARCHERS:	PI: Catherine Jermany Investigators: Jermany, Catherine~Foster, Holly~
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION:	Approved
CATEGORY:	Expedited Category
PERIOD OF APPROVAL:	15-Dec-2021 to 14-Dec-2022

Donald Sacco Jr.

Donald Sacco, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chairperson