



Student Supports: The Role of Social Safety Net Programs in College Student Success

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**CALIFORNIA
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Project Motivation



- Many students who struggle to meet their basic needs are eligible for safety net programs, but data limitations make it challenging to understand the the magnitude of participation gaps or target outreach.
 - CalFresh enrollment rates among college and graduate students have been historically difficult to estimate
- CPL has partnered with CSAC, CDSS, UCOP, and CCCCO to create a linked database on financial aid, CalFresh participation, and college enrollment

Research Goals

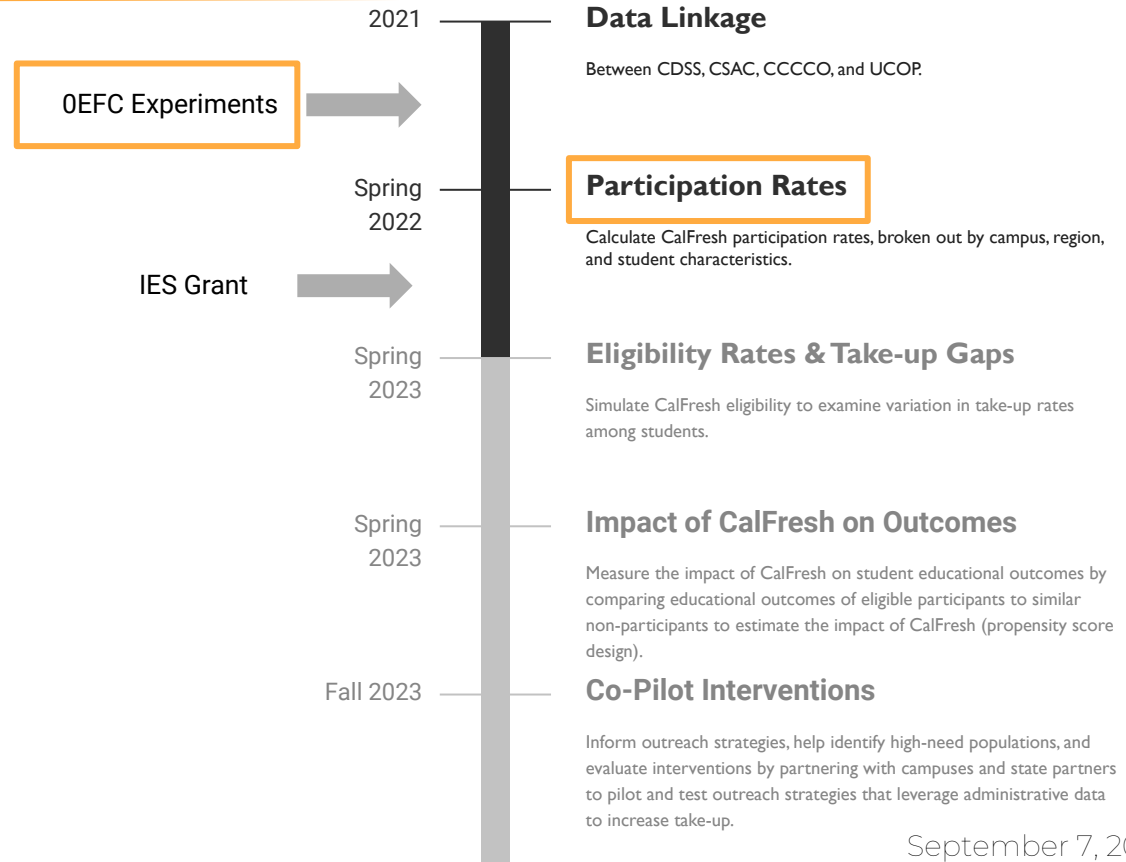


1. Calculate CalFresh **participation**, broken out by campus, region, and student characteristics
2. Simulate CalFresh **eligibility** to examine variation in take-up rates among students
3. Measure the **impact** of CalFresh on student educational outcomes
4. Inform outreach strategies, help identify high-need populations, **evaluate interventions**

Project Timeline

The IES Grant:

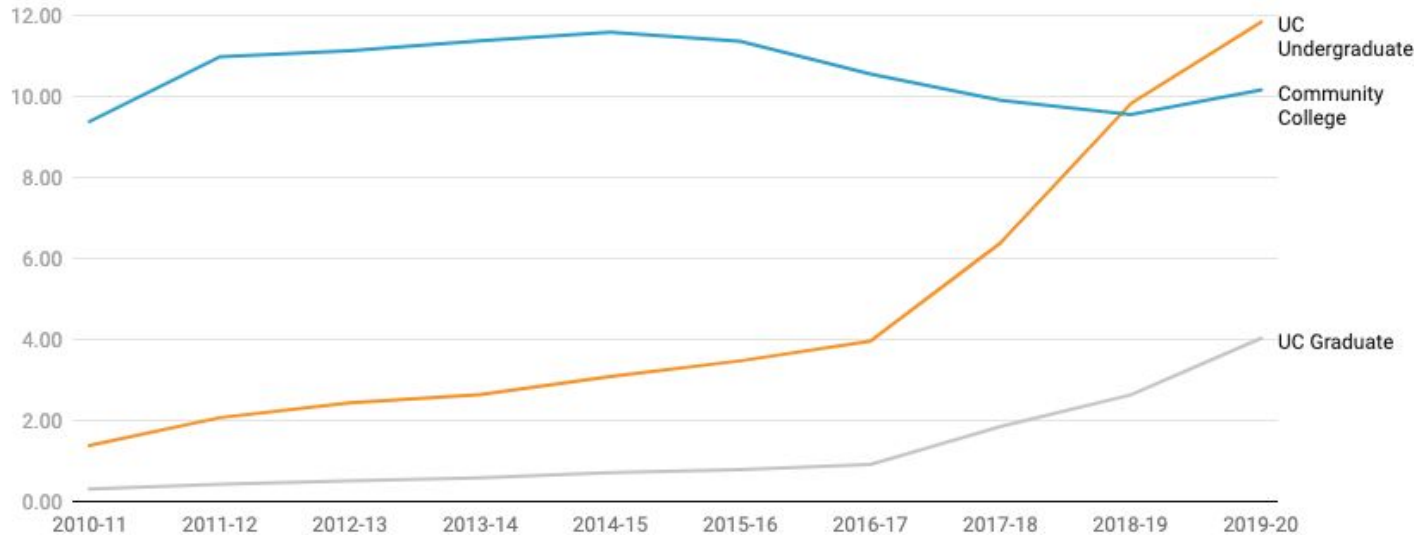
- Indicates **federal support** for better understanding the role of the safety net in supporting college students' basic needs
- Will help us continue to evaluate more interventions and **understand what works**, and potentially expand this inquiry beyond food insecurity to **other basic needs**



Trends in CF participation



CalFresh enrollment rates among college students, 2010-11 to 2019-20



2019-20 rates

- CC: 10.2%
- UC undergraduate: 11.8%
- UC grad: 4.0%

2019-20 CF participation among CC students, by financial aid status



Community College Students

	Total student count	CF enrollees	CF enrollment rate
All Students	2,229,381	226,691	10.2%
Financial aid status			
Filed FAFSA	922,150	156,108	16.9%
Did not file FAFSA	1,307,231	70,583	5.4%
Cal Grant recipient	131,036	35,045	26.7%
Pell Grant recipient	379,287	95,704	25.2%
Promise Grant recipient	852,736	154,671	18.1%
Any financial aid recipient	929,060	165,271	17.8%

2019-20 CF participation among UC students, by financial aid status



	UC Undergraduate Students			UC Graduate Students		
	Total student count	CF enrollees	CF enrollment rate	Total student count	CF enrollees	CF enrollment rate
All Students	236,365	27,987	11.8%	61,877	2,503	4.0%
Financial aid status						
Filed FAFSA	157,361	27,505	17.5%	20,726	2,258	10.9%
Did not file FAFSA	79,004	482	0.6%	41,151	245	0.6%
Cal Grant recipient	54,210	12,983	23.9%	<100	<100	-
Pell Grant recipient	82,670	22,385	27.1%	<100	<100	-
Any financial aid recipient	134,122	26,361	19.7%	28,038	1,965	7.0%

Full report available online



CalFresh participation breakdowns by:

- Campus
- Enrollment type
- Transfer status
- Year in program
- Race/ethnicity
- Gender
- Age
- First-generation student
- Zero expected family contribution
- Degree seeking
- Additional student subgroups

The screenshot shows the California Policy Lab website. The header includes the logo and navigation links: What we do, Topics, Data Resources, Publications, Newsroom, People, Contact us, and a search icon. The main content area has a yellow background with the title "California Community College and University of California student participation in CalFresh food benefits". Below the title, it shows the date "February 23, 2022", authors "By: Karla Palos, Charles Davis, Elise Dizon-Ross, Anna Doherty, Samantha Fu, Johanna Lacoe, Jesse Rothstein and Monica Saucedo", and category "Education, Safety Net". There is a search bar on the right. Below the title, there is a photo of a person in a blue jacket and mask shopping in a grocery store. To the right of the photo is a "Categories" sidebar with a search bar and a list of categories: Criminal Justice, Data Infrastructure, Education, Homeless and High-Needs, and Labor. At the bottom of the page, there is a "DATA POINT" section with the text "California Community College and University of California student participation in CalFresh food benefits" and a small icon.

<https://www.capolicylab.org/>

Zero EFC Outreach Experiments



- CPL and [The People Lab](#) assisted CSAC and CDSS with the design and evaluation of outreach to encourage CalFresh applications and enrollments among students with \$0 EFC on their FAFSAs
- Emails were sent to students first in February 2021 (experiment 1), and again with postcards in June 2021 (experiment 2):
 - **Experiment 1, Feb 2021** - varied the timing of email notifications
 - **Experiment 2, June 2021** - varied the message and modality of notifications
- The experiments tested the impact of outreach on applications via GetCalFresh.org and enrollment.

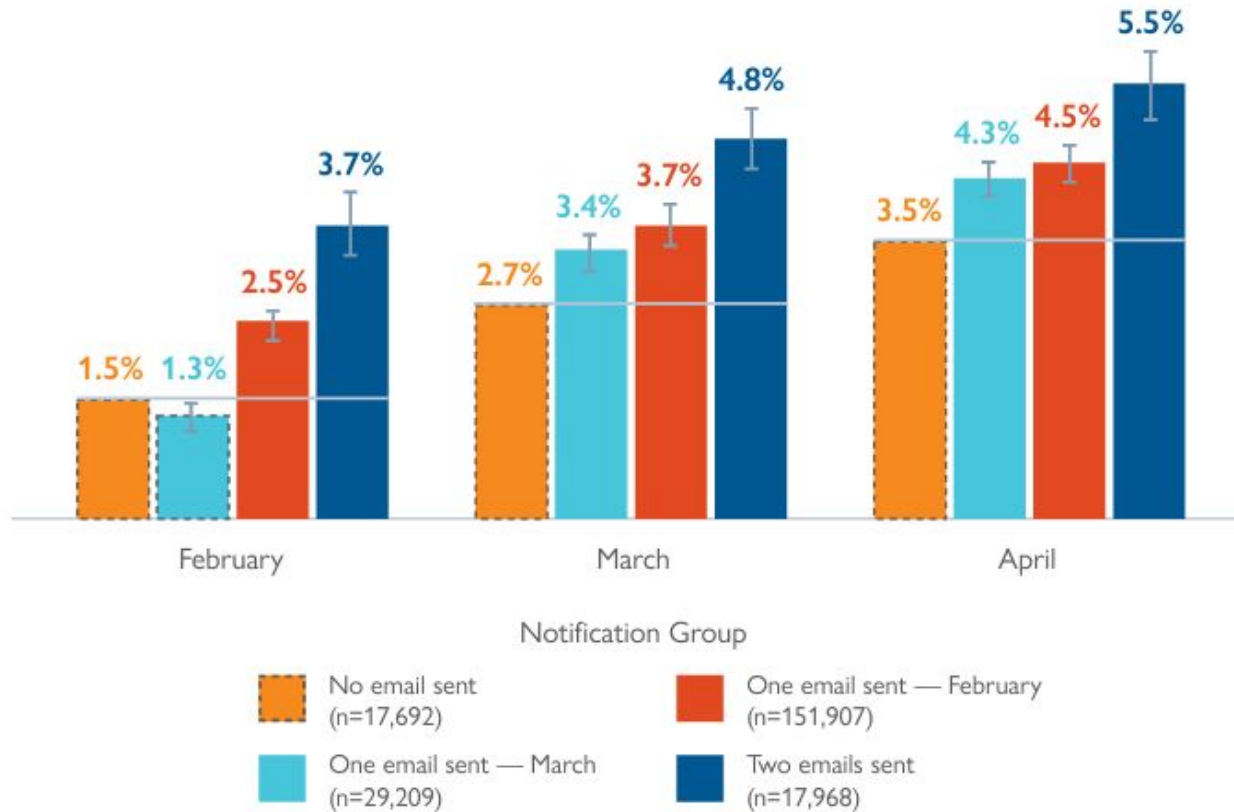


Experiment 1 Key Findings - Did Emails Work?



- The emails had a statistically significant effect on both applications and enrollments.
 - An email from CSAC led roughly 2–3% of recipients to apply for benefits through GetCalFresh.org within a week of receiving the email.
 - This translated into **an increase in enrollment of 1.5 to 2.5 percentage points.**
- Effects were even larger for students who received a second follow-up email.

FIGURE 2: CalFresh enrollment by month and notification group



Note. The figure shows cumulative enrollment in CalFresh among the experimental sample. Control groups have a dashed outline. 95% confidence intervals are shown for the contrasts of each of the notification groups relative to the “no email sent” group (yellow bar).

Experiment 2 Key Findings - Which type of messaging was most effective?



- Students were randomly assigned to receive one of four emails: (1) *Original* message, (2) *Simplified* message, (3) *De-stigmatizing* message, or (4) *Enough benefits* message. Half of each of these groups also received a postcard.
- Students who received the simplified and de-stigmatizing emails were 6% more likely to submit an application via [Getcalfresh.org](https://getcalfresh.org).
 - The de-stigmatizing messages did not yield a meaningful difference in application rates compared to the Simplified email.
- Students who received **both an email and postcard** were **68% more likely to apply** for CalFresh in the six weeks following outreach, than those who received only an email.

Implications



- Emails are a low-touch, low-cost intervention that have a small, but positive impact on CalFresh applications and enrollment.
- Email notifications appear to be more impactful when
 - a. the message is simplified
 - b. there are multiple emails
 - c. they are paired with postcards

Thank you!

- We are currently working on CalFresh eligibility simulations and impact analysis and will share findings when they are available.
- Reach out to us with questions or to learn more about this study!
(jennifer@capolicylab.org)

