



Estimating Student CalFresh Eligibility and Take-Up Rates

Jennifer Hogg (Research Manager)

Jesse Rothstein & Johanna Lacoë (co-PIs)

With: Sam Ayers, Karla Palos Castellanos,
Elise Dizon-Ross, Anna Doherty,
Jamila Henderson, Alan Perez, Justine
Weng

**CALIFORNIA
POLICY
LAB**

DRSP Committee

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The Project

The California Policy Lab

- Form lasting partnerships between University of California researchers and California government agencies to generate evidence that transforms public policy.
- Infrastructure for administrative data research
- Topics: Labor markets, education, safety net, homelessness, health, etc.

Our partners for this project:

- California Student Aid Commission (CSAC)
- California Department of Social Services (CDSS)
- California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCC)
- University of California Office of the President (UC)
- Funding from Institute for Education Sciences (grant R305A220451) and the Spencer Foundation.

Goal is to understand the role of CalFresh (SNAP) benefits for California college students.

1. How many students are receiving CalFresh benefits?
2. How many students are eligible for benefits? How many of those are receiving them?
3. What are the barriers to participation, and how can enrollment be increased?
4. What is the impact of CalFresh receipt on student success?

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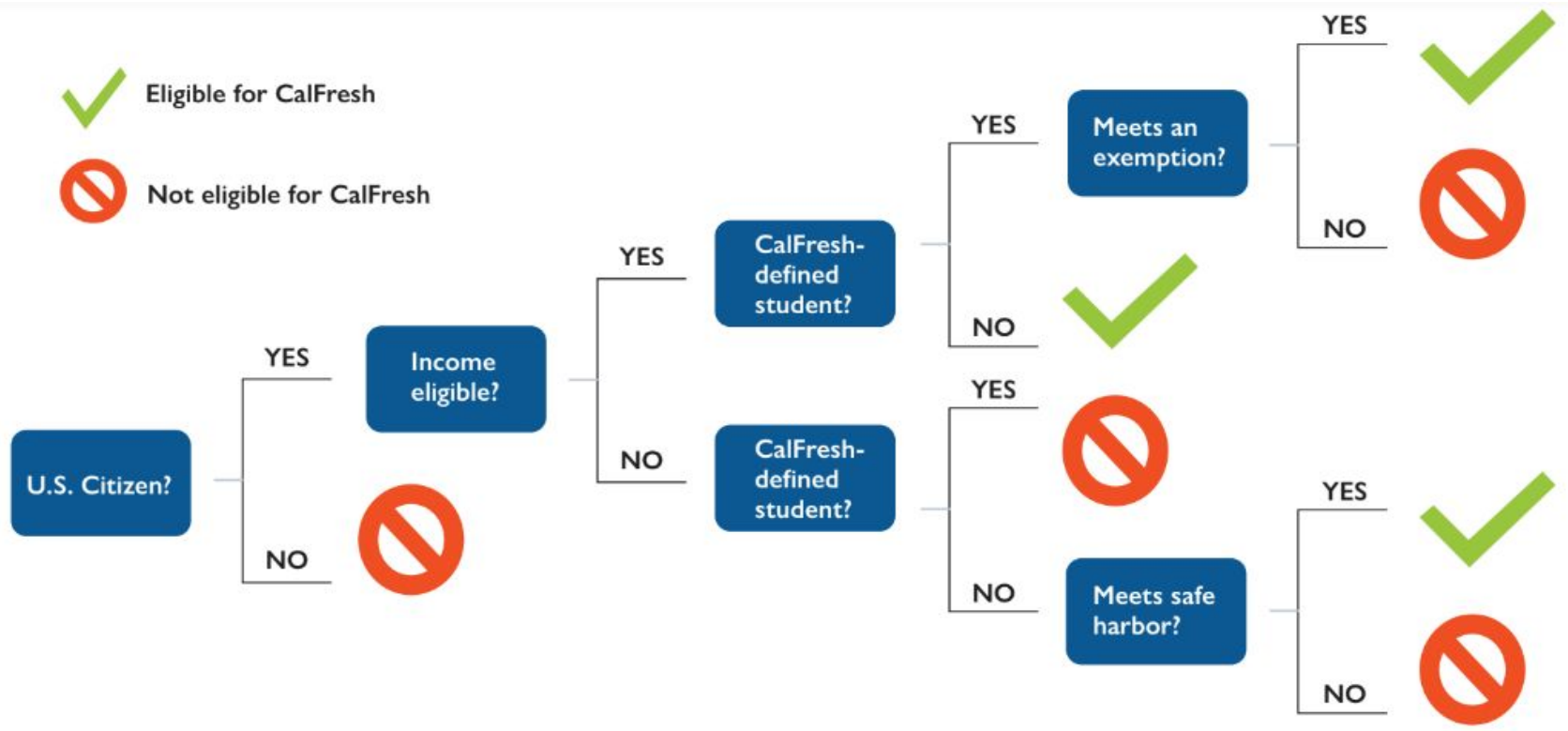
Results Preview: Eligibility & Take-Up (Fall 2019)



- Among UC undergraduates
 - At least 31% (40% of those with FAFSAs) are eligible for CF
 - Take-up rate among the most likely eligible students is 22%.
- Among community college students:
 - At least 17% (29% of those with FAFSAs) are eligible for CF
 - Take-up rate among the most likely eligible students is 30%.
- Importance of housing status.
- These likely underestimate eligibility & overstate take-up - missing exemptions is a big limitation.

How we estimate CalFresh eligibility

Student eligibility is complex



Simulating eligibility - five decisions

- Citizenship
- CalFresh student status
- Income eligibility
- Exemptions (for students)
- Safe harbors (for non-students)

Mapping data to eligibility

- **Citizenship** – Available from CCC/UC and FAFSA. Include permanent residents

Mapping data to eligibility

- Citizenship
- **CalFresh student status:** 18-49, enrolled >50% time, physically and mentally able to attend school and work.
 - Age and enrollment from CCC/UC data. Aggregate across campuses within systems.
 - Disability based on DSP/DSPS participation - for simplicity, treat as an exemption.

Mapping data to eligibility

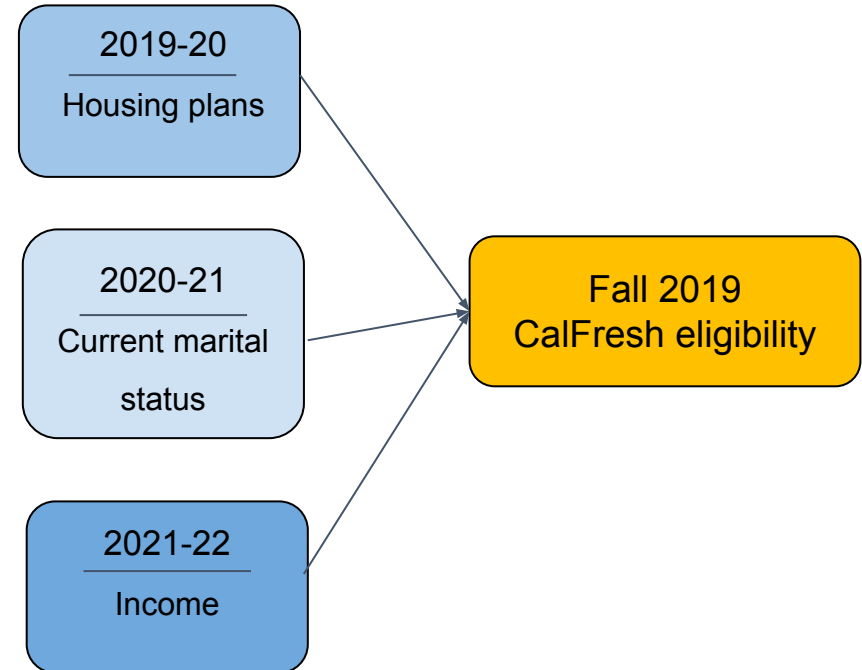
- Citizenship
- CalFresh student status
- **Income eligibility**
 - From FAFSA.
 - Household size =
 - parental household size if plan to live with parents;
 - student + spouse + children otherwise.
 - Income measured correspondingly.
 - Gross income = AGI
 - Net income = $\text{AGI} - 0.2 \times \text{earnings} - \text{std. deduction}$
 - *Students on CalWorks assumed income eligible.*

Monthly income limits for
CalFresh (SNAP) eligibility by
members per household, 2021

	Gross income limit (CA)
1	\$2,024
2	\$2,744
3	\$3,464
4	\$4,184

FAFSA timing

- FAFSA has information about the present (marital status), past (income), and future (planned living situation).
- To simulate eligibility in 2019, we look for contemporaneous, past, and future FAFSAs where available.
- Many students won't have FAFSAs for the ideal years - fall back on FAFSAs up to 3 years before or after as needed.



Which FAFSAs did we use? (Fall 2019)

		Community College Students			UC Undergraduate Students		
		Share using this year for:			Share using this year for:		
Academic year for which FAFSA filed	Relative year	FAFSA year measures	Filing year measures	Tax year measures	FAFSA year measures	Filing year measures	Tax year measures
2016-17	-3	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%
2017-18	-2	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%
2018-19	-1	6%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%
2019-20	0	77%	21%	16%	87%	22%	19%
2020-21	+1	8%	64%	18%	1%	66%	22%
2021-22	+2	5%	6%	56%	1%	1%	48%
2022-23	+3	not available			not available		

Mapping data to eligibility

- Citizenship
- CalFresh student status
- Income eligibility
- **Exemptions (for students)**

Work 80+
hours/month

CalWorks
(TANF)

TANF-funded
CalGrant
recipient

No plan to
re-enroll

Zero Expected
Family
Contribution

Enrolled in a (federal/state/local)
program to increase employability

Parent of
young child

Participating*
in work study

*Eligible for
work study*

2021-3 changes

Proxying for exemptions

CalWorks:	observed in CDSS data
TANF-funded CalGrant:	observed in CSAC
Work 80+ hours/month:	<i>no available proxy</i>
Work study:	payment of (but not eligibility for) work study funds observed in UC and CCC data
No plan to re-enroll:	use actual last term (CCC) or term of degree award (UC)
Program participation:	we observe some but not all programs in CCC and UC data. Missing many CCC LPIEs.
Parent:	Presence of child (FAFSA). At CCCs, also CARE participation, but require single parent or WIC.

Mapping data to eligibility



- Citizenship
- CalFresh student status
- Income eligibility
- Exemptions (for students)
- **Safe harbors (for non-income-eligible non-students)**
 - Elderly
 - Disabled
 - CalWorks
 - Alternative income definition

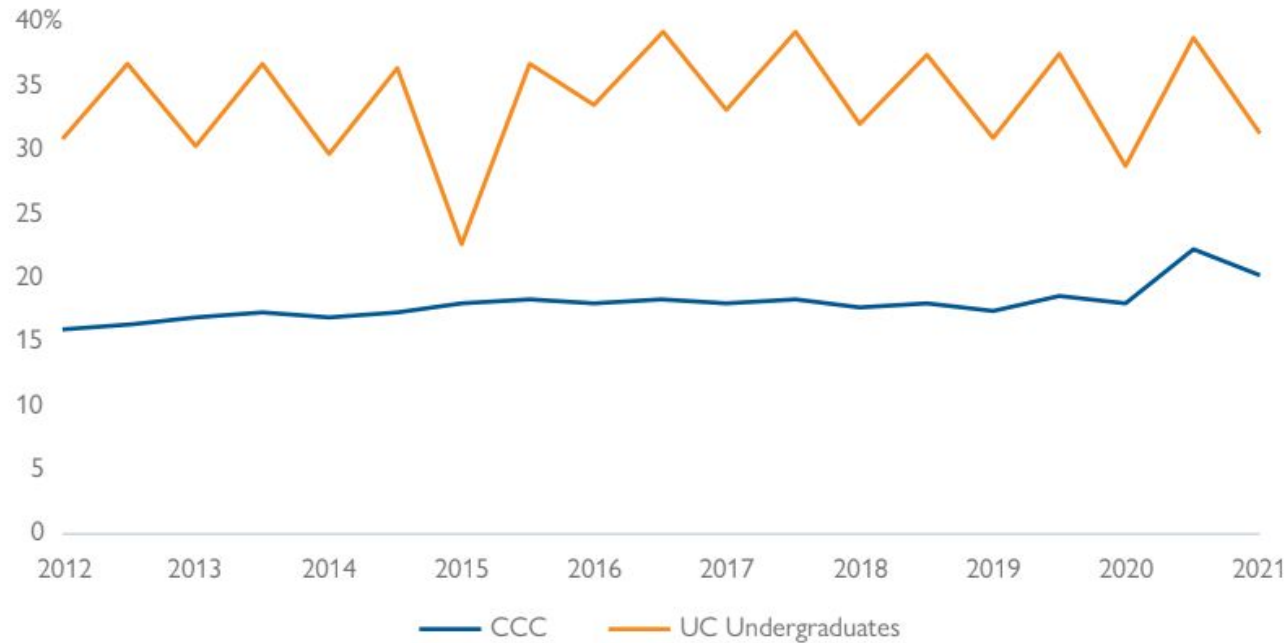
Major limitations



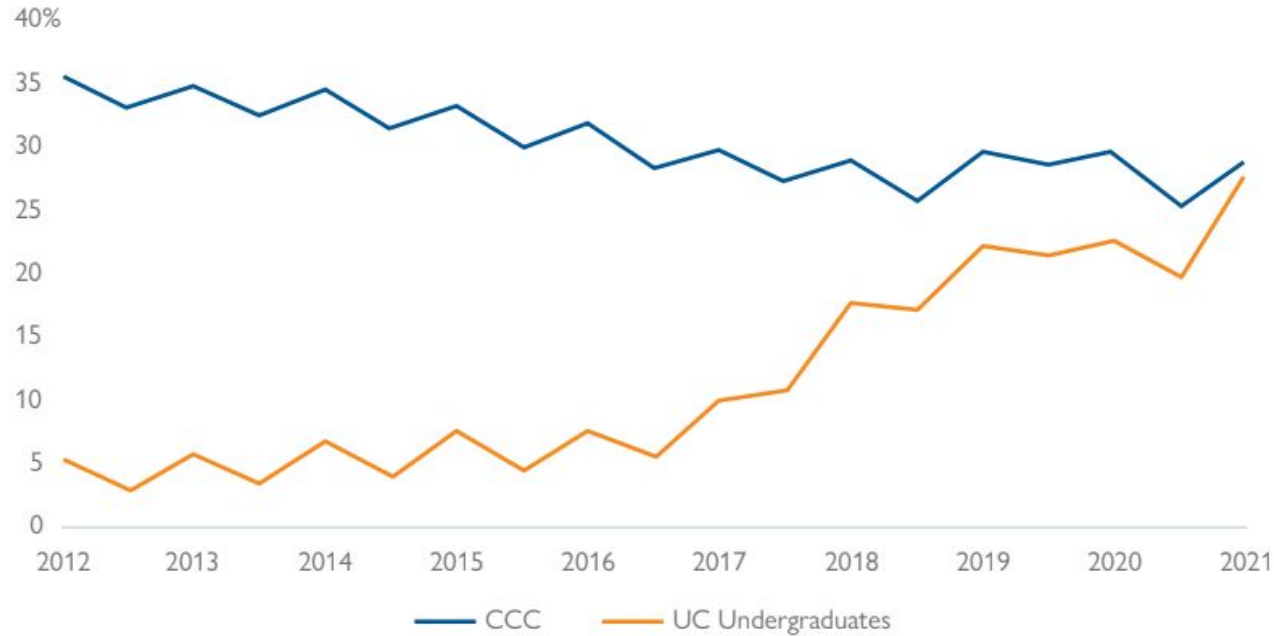
- FAFSAs: We assume non-FAFSA-filers are ineligible, unless on CalWorks.
 - This is true for 40% of CC and 22% of UC undergrad students.
- Filing units: We assume students not living with parents claim CalFresh alone - many may claim with roommates or remain on parents' case.
- Income:
 - We have income information only for those who file FAFSAs, only in the years that they file.
 - Even annual income from the right year isn't a perfect proxy for the monthly income used to assess eligibility.
- Exemptions: We are missing information about several types.
- Dormitories and meal plans: Not incorporated

Results

Eligibility rates over time



Participation among eligible students over time



Why is eligibility higher for UC than CCC students?

Four important factors:

- Presence of FAFSAs
- Family incomes
- Living situations (with parents vs. not)
- Exemptions

We created a simulated counterfactual (if UC students had characteristics like CC students) and determined that different living situations made up the majority of the difference in eligibility rates.

Which exemptions?



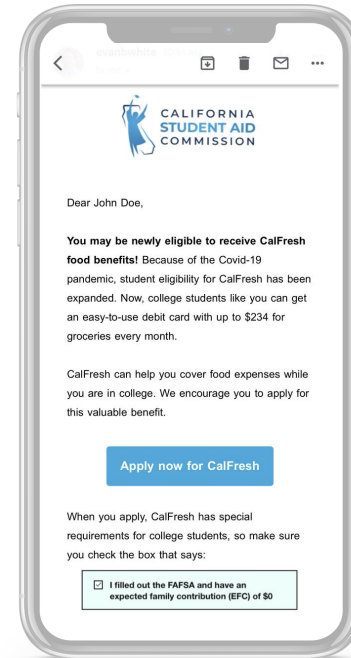
Exemption	Community College Students				UC Undergraduate Students		
	Share of all students	Share of income-eligible FAFSA-filers	CF participation rate among income-eligible		Share of all students	Share of income-eligible FAFSA-filers	CF participation rate among income-eligible
Cal Grant	11.4%	20.6%	30.4%		19.7%	25.7%	27.0%
CalWORKS	1.7%	4.5%	94.8%		0.1%	0.1%	92.0%
Work Study	1.1%	2.1%	45.3%		6.3%	8.5%	35.8%
EOP	8.2%	14.9%	40.1%		14.8%	19.1%	28.7%
Foster youth (proxy)	1.3%	2.5%	37.0%		0.1%	0.1%	n.r.
LPIE	0.1%	0.1%	n.r.				
Other	2.1%	2.9%	45.2%				
DSPS	5.3%	6.8%	33.0%		3.8%	4.0%	21.1%
Parent	3.4%	6.1%	64.5%		0.8%	0.7%	45.7%
Next term	13.6%	12.4%	24.1%		2.5%	2.2%	12.4%
None	63.7%	51.3%	11.1%		65.9%	57.7%	4.3%
Total			21.2%				12.8%

How can enrollment be increased?

0EFC Evaluation Summary



- CSAC outreach to 0EFC students in 2021 had a small but significant impact on take-up of CalFresh
- Email notifications appear to be more impactful when
 - The message is simplified
 - There are multiple (2) emails
 - They are paired with postcards
- Policy Briefs available on our website:
“Outreach to California College Students Encouraged Them to Apply for CalFresh”



Next Steps & Discussion

Discussion & Next Steps

- Examine benefits use during transition from K-12 to high school
 - Incorporate benefit \$ amounts into analysis
 - Test effectiveness of methods for enrolling more eligible students
 - Any innovative approaches we should test?
 - Incorporating public benefits into financial aid communications?
 - Other relevant questions we can answer using our linked dataset?
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- How can these results inform your work?
 - How will new FAFSA influence these efforts?