LFS 450: SEEDS Report

Evaluating the Efficacy of the AMS Food Bank

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SEEDS Program

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMS: Alma Mater Society

UBC: University of British Columbia, Vancouver Campus

FB: Food Bank

GPA: Grade Point Average

CBAR: Community-Based Action Research

PRACTITIONER SUMMARY

Background

      The AMS Food Bank provides emergency food services to the UBC community, including students, faculty, and staff, to help alleviate food insecurity. UBC students are experiencing food insecurity, with 19% reporting concerns about running out of food at least once a month (Yee et al., 2021). The growing food issues in the UBC community have increased reliance on the AMS Food Bank, with 600 visits to the Food Bank recorded from February to March 2022 (Prost, 2022). As the need for emergency food aid increases, the Food Bank faces many challenges, including providing equitable access for all. Moreover, students of other nationalities are 4.1 times more likely to experience food insecurity, as evidenced by the 28.6% of the AMS Food Bank users who are international students (Marques et al., 2022; UBC, 2022). These issues are significant as inadequate access to food can negatively impact an individual's academic or work performance and physical and mental health (Cady, 2014; Meza et al., 2019).

Goal

      Together with the AMS Food Bank team, our group aimed to develop a plan to reduce barriers to community access to food by helping the AMS Food Bank work more efficiently.

Methods

      Our project took a multi-pronged approach to understand what barriers the AMS Food Bank was currently facing to achieving its overarching goals from the perspective of the FB operators and its users. This multi-pronged approach consisted of a literature review, surveys with the FB users, and focus group interviews with FB users. We identified promising solutions in similar fields through a thorough literature review to understand how Food Banks operate in other contexts and find more efficient practices from other Food Banks. The survey allowed us to gain a general understanding of normal experiences in FB and the focus group provided us with deeper insights of reasons of food scarcity perception among FB users.

Key findings

      Through these approaches, we learned that a shift from old food distribution model to new model has created a reliable adequate food supply for many FB users. We also found that many FB users reported that some parts including line-up, interaction with volunteers, and quality and quantity of food can still result in the perception of food scarcity. As food scarcity is defined as inadequate of food is produced, uneven distribution of natural resource by a country or by institutions (Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, 2022). We combined the results and feedback from survey and focus groups to develop suggestions for FB about the next steps, including:
1. Selection improvement,
2. Food Bank recipes,
3. Food bank signage,
4. Feedback voting system,
5. Improving volunteer interactions.

Conclusions

      We believed that our recommendations would help FB to lower the barriers to access emergency food services on UBC campus and improve overall wellbeing of UBC community. More importantly, a good relationship could be established between FB users and operators through these ways, which ultimately resulted in the alleviation of food insecurity at UBC. An infographic presentation of this summary can be seen in Appendix A.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The AMS Food Bank (FB) has seen a 600-visit spike between February and March of 2022, with gradual increases monthly, inducing a strain on the Food Bank's budget and resources (Prost, 2022). Students, faculty, and staff at UBC are affected by food insecurity, with 40% of UBC students reporting the fear of inadequate resources to afford food (Rideout & James, 2017). The AMS Food Bank (2022) conducted a demographic survey on its clients, which revealed that 93% of them are students, many of them being post-graduates. Furthermore, research by Fazal and colleagues (2022) seconds the significance of this issue, indicating that food security is an equity issue, disproportionately impacting certain intersectional groups, such as historically marginalized groups. The study also found that food insecurity influences academic performance. For instance, by making it more challenging to concentrate in class and thereby lowering grades, reducing the ability to submit assignments punctually, and lengthening the time it takes to graduate (Fazal et al., 2022).

Our team collaborated with the AMS Food Bank clients in implementing actions that facilitate low-barrier access to emergency food assistance and advancing campus food security. Through our collaboration, we identified that although the AMS Food Bank has recently shifted to a new food distribution model that allows for sufficient and equitable food access, there remains long lines prior to opening due to former perceptions of scarcity. Perceptions of scarcity among FB users is the belief that there will not be enough food at the FB to meet their needs, thus, resulting in feelings of uncertainty and fear. In which, through our research we identified the themes that perpetuate feelings of scarcity to be poor selection, interactions at the FB, and the overall experience at the FB, including the line-up and past encounters.

By adopting a Community-Based Action Research (CBAR), using surveys, focus groups, observational research, and literature reviews, this process directly identified the community's needs while looking for ways to improve the practice(s) of the FB. CBAR was essential to our project as it aims to comprehend from the ground up how problems arise in communities and how members perceive and experience them. Thus, by utilizing a community-driven technique, it was possible to minimize the risk of power disparities and preconceived notions to create notable improvements that benefit both the Food Bank's consumers and organizers (Gullion & Tilton, 2020). Furthermore, this community-driven research promoted food sovereignty within urban environments by dissolving geographic, physical, cultural, and economic drawbacks in accessing healthy food resources.

Based on the identified issues and suggestions from FB users, several recommendations were created, including selection improvement, FB recipes, FB signage, feedback voting system, and enhancing volunteer interactions. Ultimately, these actions could address the goals of the AMS Food Bank in reducing barriers, lowering the sense of scarcity, and improving the capacity to satisfy the demands of users and operators. In addition, these processes will contribute towards the UBC Student Strategic Plan, AMS Sustainable Action Plan, and the Wellbeing Strategic Framework, which intends to promote the health and wellbeing of students by ensuring students feel more supported and included in decision-making. Furthermore, the deliverables can contribute to how national policies address food insecurity and food-related health outcomes.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 RESEARCH TOPIC

The topic of this report is feelings of scarcity among users of the AMS Food Bank. Feelings of scarcity develop when there is not enough supply of a resource. In the context of Food Banks, food and food rations is the resource in question. Beyond feelings of scarcity, topics relevant to this project are food insecurity, barriers to emergency food access and the negative impacts these can have on an individual. Food insecurity, which is insufficient or insecure access to food due to financial constraints, at the University of British Columbia (UBC) negatively impacts 40% of students (Rideout & James, 2017). Barriers to emergency food access at UBC may include class schedules that conflict with FB operating hours, a limited number of visits, food items that run out, the stigma around seeking food aid, and many more.

Operators observed behaviours associated with perceptions of scarcity or fear of food running out, such as clients requesting more than the daily ration and lining up in advance. These behaviours may interfere with the Food Bank's ability to create an efficient and positive experience, so our team was tasked with determining the origins of perceptions which may lead to those behaviours. Our research provided an opportunity to uncover where these feelings came from and develop strategies and recommendations to mitigate these feelings' efficacy and efficiency at the AMS Food Bank. These actions can address these feelings of scarcity, lower barriers to emergency food access, and alleviate campus food insecurity.

1.2 RESEARCH RELEVANCE

The AMS Food Bank operates with the help of volunteers and sponsors to provide emergency food relief services for UBC staff and students. However, due to recent visits surging due to the pandemic and inflation, the Food Bank faces challenges in meeting the increasing demands of patrons and operators (Simpson & Neufeld, 2022). The AMS Food Bank reported an increase from 1,513 visits in the 2019/20 academic year to 2,373 in the 2020/21 academic year, in addition to the demand that had already been growing continuously since 2011 (AMS

Food Bank, 2022). As a result, Food Bank operators are seeing behaviours that reflect feelings of uncertainty among users in the ability of the Food Bank to meet their needs. National figures also reflect this surge in demand for emergency food relief. According to survey findings from Statistics Canada (2020), 14.6%, or roughly one in seven Canadians, report experiencing household food insecurity. However, the statistics for post-secondary students are even higher, with approximately 40% of UBC Vancouver students facing food insecurity (Rideout & James, 2017). This development may be under COVID-19 imposed outcomes of suspending all non-essential activities, with drastic decreases to campus food operations and increases in reduced working hours and unemployment. Our research will acknowledge the underlying causes for increased barriers to food access and address perceptions of food scarcity while formulating strategies to alleviate campus food insecurity.

As food insecurity is an intersectional issue that disproportionately affects historically marginalized groups, it is crucial to analyze broader societal issues like systemic racism and economic and gender inequality. Thus, this project calls for a ground-up framework to avert the risk of power imbalance and preconceived notions to produce tangible changes that benefit both the Food Bank users and organizers (Gullion & Tilton, 2020). The community-based approach decentres the perspective of dominant social groups, constructs rapport with all stakeholders, and heightens the researchers' awareness of their position and participation in social inequalities (Bartleet, 2017). Such efforts can permit more reciprocal and efficient strategies that undertake the concerns and needs of the AMS Food Bank users who may be inequitably impacted by campus food insecurity. Furthermore, this project aligns with the UBC Student Strategic Plan, AMS Sustainable Action Plan, and the Wellbeing Strategic Framework, which all aim to reduce food insecurity to advance student health and wellbeing. For instance, our project supports the Student Strategic Plan, which intends to commit to student wellbeing by ensuring they feel included, supported, and respected in their university interactions. Our approach contributes to these objectives by working alongside the community to develop the best practices to address their concerns regarding inadequate food access and perceptions of food scarcity. This methodology would therefore inform a more inclusive campus food environment for disenfranchised students.

Our work with the AMS Food Bank attempts to alleviate feelings of shame involved with accessing services that support food security among UBC students and staff, with the hopes that these newfound strategies

may bolster food sovereignty within the UBC food system. In turn, the focus of our project and its implications will influence the broader societal importance of creating sustainable and just food systems through community-focused commitments. Thus, our research pertaining to lowering barriers to food access, like implementing a more dynamic food aid system and reducing the perception of food scarcity within the community, can contribute to national and international initiatives to advance food security and sovereignty.

1.3 PROJECT CONTEXT

Between the financial burdens of paying for school and the increasing costs of groceries, many students must choose between focusing on food or focusing on their academics (Meza et al., 2019). Estimates show that between 33 to 51% of college students in North America are food insecure; in contrast, the rate of food insecurity among adults is 9.8% (Ellison et al., 2021). Food insecurity also disproportionately affects females, students living on campus, minorities (e.g., black or Indigenous students), and international students (Bottorff et al., 2020). The impacts of food security on a student's life are widespread. Studies have evidenced that food insecurity can be detrimental to academic performance, behaviour, and physical wellbeing (van Woerden, Hruschka, & Bruening, 2018). For example, students facing food insecurity typically have lower GPAs than their classmates; food insecurity also correlates to higher drop-out rates among these individuals (Van Woerden, Hruschka, & Bruening, 2018). Food insecure students have further reported psychosocial impacts, such as a fear of disappointing family, resentment of more "well-off" students, inability to develop meaningful social relationships, and frustration with the academic institution for not providing enough support (Meza et al., 2019). Lastly, there is an association between food insecurity and several mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety, and self-harming behaviours (Oh et al., 2022).

Students at UBC are no exception to the food insecurity crisis. A study by the Faculty of Land and Food Systems found that over 40% of UBC Vancouver students reported being food insecure (Rideout & James, 2017). Furthermore, approximately 43% of students are concerned about running out of food at least once per year, and 19% are concerned about having no food at least once per month (Yee et al., 2021). As the number of students facing food insecurity continues to increase on campus, UBC community members have continued to voice their frustration about the university's continued inaction. Growing tensions resulted in hundreds of students walking

out of classes in October 2022 to demand that the university implement measures to reduce food insecurity on campus (Kulkarni, 2022). Facing mounting backlash from students, faculty members, and the public, the university pledged half a million dollars in aid toward campus food security programs, with about 30% of the funding going toward the AMS Food Bank (Buszard, 2022).

The growing food insecurity on the UBC campus has directly resulted in students, staff, and faculty relying more on the UBC AMS Food Bank for support. According to the 2022/23 AMS Services Review, the Food Bank is currently the most utilized AMS service (Simpson & Neufeld, 2022). While demand for the service has gradually increased over the last decade, the number of visits has rapidly increased since the return of in-person classes in September 2021 (Simpson & Neufeld, 2022). In the 2022/23 academic year alone, monthly usage has increased to the point where the FB is struggling to keep up with user demand. The AMS projects that over 15,000 total individual visits will occur before the end of the 2022/23 school year in April (Simpson & Neufeld, 2022).

Along with rising visits, the FB has also noted increases in users' perceptions of scarcity. These perceptions of scarcity are the result of how users view the stock of the FB – users may believe that there will not be enough food for them, resulting in feelings of uncertainty, angst, and anger. Despite changes to the operating procedure designed to ensure equitable access for all users, the Food Bank has continued to struggle with long lines before opening, uncomfortable interactions between patrons and staff, and a lack of a system to collect feedback (K. Simpson, personal communication, January 25, 2023). As food insecurity continues to rise on the UBC Vancouver campus, the challenges posed by perceptions of scarcity are expected to intensify, directly resulting in detriments to the Food Bank's operations and putting further strain on the service.

1.4 PROJECT PURPOSE, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Purpose:

The purpose of this project is to assist the AMS Food Bank in maintaining low barriers to emergency food access.

Goals:

1. Identify what causes feelings of food scarcity based on input from Food Bank clients.
2. Evaluate methods in which the Food Bank can diminish feelings of food scarcity among clients.
3. Gain insight on methods to increase feedback from Food Bank users.

Objectives:

1. Identify methods to improve rates of feedback from users.

2. Develop recommendations on how to improve confidence in the FB's ability to provide food access.

3. Identify experiences of food scarcity among Food Bank users through primary research including a survey and focus group of Food Bank users.

2. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

2.1 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology selected for this project was Community-Based Action Research (CBAR), described as "community-generated and community-implemented solutions rather than a 'one size fits all' solution imposed by an outside expert" (Gullion & Tilton, 2020). Specifically, from focus groups, anonymous surveys, and site visits, the experiences of both users and operators of the AMS Food Bank substantially influenced our work. We consulted directly with the FB at each subsequent stage of our research for feedback, allowing our project to be participant driven. Participants conveyed their concerns and opinions to us in multiple forms. We offered qualitative survey responses and two separate one-hour focus group discussions to provide ample opportunity for sharing of concerns by the target community. By listening to their concerns, we developed a project that found pivot points identified by community members to suggest alterations that may improve the user's experience. Therefore, our project's agenda was driven by the community.

2.2 RESEARCH METHODS

Our research methods included secondary and primary data collection including a review of literature, an anonymous digital survey, and two in person focus groups. Further details on each of these methods are included below. See Section 2.2.1 for Secondary Data Collection Methods and 2.2.2 for Primary Data Collection Methods.

2.2.1 SECONDARY DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Our secondary research included a review of current literature, including reports, journal articles and data provided by our client. The objectives of the secondary research were to uncover strategies used by other Food

Banks to address feelings of scarcity and create dignified experiences, along with understanding the origins of the scarcity mindset. We searched for publications less than 25 years old (except for two book excerpts), including studies on past and current FB practices, user experiences worldwide, and data collected by the AMS Food Bank. We conducted secondary research to identify the origins of thought behind certain behaviours and to develop an informed survey, which required understanding the context of typical FB experiences.

Search criteria included keywords such as: food policy, impacts of food security, foodbank experience, dignified food access, stigma and poverty, shame and scarcity, neoliberal origins, and scarcity economics. Search engines used were PubMed, Google Scholar, and UBC Library. AMS specific past reports were obtained directly through the community partner or the AMS Food Bank website, and public reports were obtained from government or institutional websites such as PROOF reports from the University of Toronto. Types of secondary data used were books, organizational reports, policy reports, published journal articles (reviews and qualitative data), public health records and government website data.

2.2.2 PRIMARY DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Survey

The target sample for our survey was the UBC community members that use the FB; UBC community members were chosen as the target sample because the survey's primary objective was to identify the main sources of users' perceptions of scarcity when they visit the FB. The survey asked users questions (see Appendix D) regarding how often they use the service, their feelings about visiting, their experience waiting in line, the selection of food (e.g., opinions on both current and hypothetical options), availability of food, and if/how the FB can meet their needs. We aimed to receive at least 60 responses and generate a 20% response rate – these values were based on the amount daily users for November in the 2022 AMS services review, equal to about 300 patrons.

Focus Group

As with the survey, the target population for the focus groups was members of the UBC community who use the FB. This population was the target sample because the purpose of the focus groups was to identify experiences of food scarcity from the perspective of FB users. Our hoped-for sample size was 10-15 participants,

and we ended up with 11 participants over the two focus groups, which is 7% of the survey respondents. The first focus group, held on Wednesday, March 15th, had 5 participants and the second, held on Thursday, March 16th, had 6 participants. To conduct the focus group, we developed a series of questions based on requests from our client, preliminary observations from survey findings, and questions inspired by our literature review. An example of these questions is: "What is your experience like now that the new model has been implemented? Which do you prefer and why?" The complete set of questions can be found in Appendix D.

2.3 METHODS OF ADMINISTRATION

Survey

We chose to use an anonymous survey as one of our primary data collection methods to hear directly from patrons in a manner where they could be honest about their experiences with the FB without fear of retaliation for their comments; the FB itself also informed us that we could not personally interview users as they waited in line, even if they remained anonymous in our final report. The survey also allowed us to notice recurring themes and commonly cited aspects of the FB that contribute to the majority of users' perceptions of scarcity – these themes ultimately helped us to tailor our recommendations to address users' perceptions of scarcity at its sources directly.

The survey was created electronically using the UBC Qualtrics tool and contained 28 questions. The questions were a mixture of multiple-choice, multiple-response, ranking, and open-ended. The survey was advertised to users by placing posters containing a scannable QR code and web address (Appendix B) in the line-up area outside of the FB. This location was chosen so that FB users could complete the survey on their smartphones, laptops, or other devices while waiting in line. To ensure that our response sample only contained individuals who use the Food Bank took if a respondent selected "no" to Question 1 ("Do you use the AMS Food Bank?"), the survey would automatically end before they could see or answer the other questions. To incentivize participation, we gave respondents the option to enter a raffle for one of two $50 AMS Food Services gift cards by leaving their email at the end of the survey (Question 26). We also asked respondents if they would like to be contacted about our focus group (Question 27), emphasising the separate incentives for focus group attendees and which day they would prefer to participate (Question 28). The survey advertisement posters were up on Monday, March 14, 2023. The survey was open for responses for nine days, and we decided that no additional advertising was necessary during

this period due to the number of responses collected daily. The survey was closed, and the posters were removed on the evening of Thursday, March 23, 2023.

Focus Group

Participants were recruited for the focus groups via convenience sampling from the anonymous survey. At the end of the survey, there was a question about whether the person would be comfortable providing an email to be contacted about participation in the focus group. This question also included information on the incentives for participation and the time and locations for the focus groups. 49 respondents said they would be willing to be contacted, and those who provided an email were contacted. We wanted to provide incentives to encourage participation and show gratitude to participants for giving an hour of their time. These included a $15 AMS Services gift card and a catered meal, including sandwiches, fruit and juice.

The focus groups took place over two days. The first was on March 15th, and the second was on March 16th. Both lasted 1 hour, from 5 pm and 6 pm. Due to room availability, the first focus group was in SCRF 1020, and the second was in CIRS Policy Lab A&B. We decided to administer focus groups rather than interviews because it allowed us the bandwidth to incorporate more voices than if we spoke to individuals one on one. We also decided to hold the focus groups in person to allow for more emotion to be conveyed during the discussions.

3. RESULTS

3.1 LITERARTURE REVIEW

This Literature Review analyzed various sources to gain insight on topics including food security rates, stigmatization of poverty, origins of the scarcity mindset, and common themes of foodbank experiences.

Food Security

The Food and Agriculture Organization states that a person is food insecure "when they lack regular access to enough safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life." People who experience food insecurity have limited access to needed food and experience hunger as a result.

Canada is one of the highest-income countries, yet 5.8 million Canadians, including 1.4 million children, experienced food insecurity in 2021 (PROOF, 2022). Food insecurity was described as a top priority in one of the six primary outcomes of the Food Policy for Canada in 2019 (Agriculture and Agri-food Canada, 2019).

As food insecurity has grown, UBC community members have increasingly relied on the Food Bank's support to meet their weekly needs. This issue has resulted in the Food Bank becoming the most utilized AMS service, with usage growing exponentially since the return of in-person classes in September 2021 (Simpson & Neufeld, 2022). While the Food Bank is equipped to provide students, staff, and faculty with emergency food aid, dependence on the service has strained its ability to provide equitable food access to all patrons (Simpson & Neufeld, 2022). Despite changing to a station model and moving to a more prominent location, the FB has struggled to meet ever-rising user demand and provide enough food to improve food security for the UBC community. While institutions work towards creating inclusive policies, the public battles their perceptions of scarcity.

<u>Stigma</u>

Food Bank usage has historically been stigmatized (Goffman, 1963), creating challenges for users and operators which prevent the Food Bank from providing a positive and practical experience. Food Bank users are often perceived to be, and perceive themselves to be, at fault for their circumstances (Swales et al., 2020). A 2018 review of FB experiences in high-income countries found that users reported embarrassment, degradation, intimidation, powerlessness, and guilt (Middleton et al., 2018). Poppendieck's 1999 novel summarizes their description of shame, which explains how reliance on food charity undermines human dignity and challenges someone's social and economic worth, "tantamount to an admission of failure." FB users are typically seen as impoverished and sometimes expected to prove their status by filling out paperwork or answering questions about their level of need. Most users described feeling an inherent lack of value, intense embarrassment, and deep shame (Swales et al., 2020). Users are fighting an already tough emotional battle against external and internal negative perceptions (Middleton et al., 2018). To combat this, it becomes imperative that a visit to the FB is a welcoming, warm, and positive one.

A typical foodbank experience begins with waiting in line (Swales et al., 2020). This period of standing and waiting to be gifted with food creates an opportunity to be seen and viewed by others and a space to reflect on one's deflated status (Swales et al., 2020). The researchers of this publication analyzed 21 interviews with FB clients in the United States in 2016 (Swales et al., 2020). One user described feeling the gaze of a woman in line. It triggered guilt because he imagined that she judged him for being at the FB instead of looking for work (Swales et al., 2020). Regardless of the woman's true intention, the user's internalization of the stigma was enough to engage the user in negative self-talk and concern about judgements from others. Michael Morgan's *On Shame* describes how "we feel as we do because we have internalized the external judgment of failure or inadequacy." This example shows how the stigmatization of people in poverty becomes internalized for users, affecting their perceptions of identity and self-worth. Therefore, it is unsurprising that a common concern expressed by foodbank users is the ability to remain anonymous.

Scarcity

Cambridge Dictionary defines *scarcity* as a lack of something or a situation in which something is inadequate or insufficient. When households experience food insecurity, they have insufficient means to purchase the food they need, forcing them to seek emergency food aid. Therefore, scarcity exists within the user's mind upon arrival, which can be perpetuated by the experience of the foodbank itself (May et al., 2019). A 2018 review of FB experiences in high-income countries found that participants identified limited choice and poor quality as the primary concern, where most user comments about the FB selection were negative (Middleton et al., 2018). An analysis of 7 focus groups in Southern Australia in 2017 found that donated food is usually limited in quantity and quality and rarely meets individual households' relevant needs or nutritional requirements (Booth et al., 2018). Limiting the number of items per person is often a strategy for the operators to distribute resources evenly. However, if *scarcity* is defined as the lack of something or the limitation of a resource, then this procedure perpetuates the inherent definition of scarcity itself (May et al., 2019).

The reason for limiting items is based on the Food Banks' awareness of limited resources in the present and the expectation of limited resources in the future. Enforcing a restricted number of items per person exposes

an undersupply, further driving perceptions of scarcity. In an article by Marcus Doel (2009), describes that Food Banks are "fated to allocate scarce resources, obligated to utilize deficient means, and duty bound to minimize waste ... condemned forever to spin around in [a] vortex of calculation". It can be interpreted that staff may believe they have mitigated a poor experience stretching resources to reach every person and avoid running out of stock. However, the very act of rationing drives the acknowledgement among users that the FB may be struggling to meet their growing needs (May et al., 2019).

The poor quality of items offered and enforced acceptance can further perceptions of scarcity when accessing the FB. Poor quality was associated with the spoilage of food or its desirability. For example, some users reported accepting food they usually would not eat, did not know how to cook with, and could not make a palatable meal from (Douglas et al., 2015). In a publication from 2005, a primary analysis of observational and qualitative data conducted in 15 Food Banks in Canada uncovered that Food Bank recipients were usually expected to accept their ration and be grateful for it, regardless of the quality or dietary relevance (Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003). Scarcity is engrained in this display of forced acceptance and gratitude in a circular manner. The users' willingness to accept low-quality food without complaint is believed to confirm their need. However, clients who request more or changes are perceived as abusing the system or lacking gratitude (Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003). People experience true scarcity within their own life, followed by a visit to the foodbank where scarcity is also prevalent, in a cycle of limited resources being delegated in restricted ways to people expected to display confirmation of their desperation. In this way, the cycle can be perpetuated through the institution's structures (Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003). When the need for food and the effort to obtain it becomes a battle of scarcities, we begin to answer our question of where perceptions of scarcity emerge.

Please note: The experiences described in our Literature Review were pulled from publications from around the world to inform our team about relevant perspectives on scarcity and universal Food Bank experiences. These descriptions may or may not be reflected in the specific experiences of users at the AMS Food Bank.

3.2 SURVEY RESULTS

The LFS 450 Food Bank User Survey was open from March 14th to March 23rd, 2023, to any student, faculty or staff member who used the service. It included questions on time and frequency of visits, number of dependents, food preferences, line-up experience, atmosphere, distribution model and expectations.

Visit Times and Dependents:

Out of 141 survey responses, 48.2% of users visit the AMS foodbank Once per week, and only 5.7% visit both the allowed days at Twice per week. Most users claim they have no dependents (40.4%), while 27% support one, 17% support two, and 15.6% support three or more. Users visit the book bank most often between 2-3pm (24.8%), but also between 12-1pm (22%).

Provided as a typed response, users described what factors affect their decision about when to visit (examples and analysis seen in Appendix C). The most common responses mentioned class times and schedules. Many respondents considered how busy it would be at a specific time or the length of the lineup. Others mentioned that their decisions were based on need. For example, when they are low on money or running out of food. The expected selection was also a consideration. Some responses mentioned more than one of these key topics in their answers, such as this response, "Possible line, thinking about selection/running out of food, personal schedule." One user described, "What is offered at the Food Bank, usually meat and other better options are offered in the [beginning] and run out quickly. So, if I was to go later it would be the same thing every time."

Line Up:

When asked if there was a line-up when they arrive, 82.9% answered Yes, and 33.6% of users plan to arrive early to secure a place in line. Users most commonly wait 5-15 minutes (50.7%), with 23% waiting between 35mins to over an hour, shown in Figure 1.
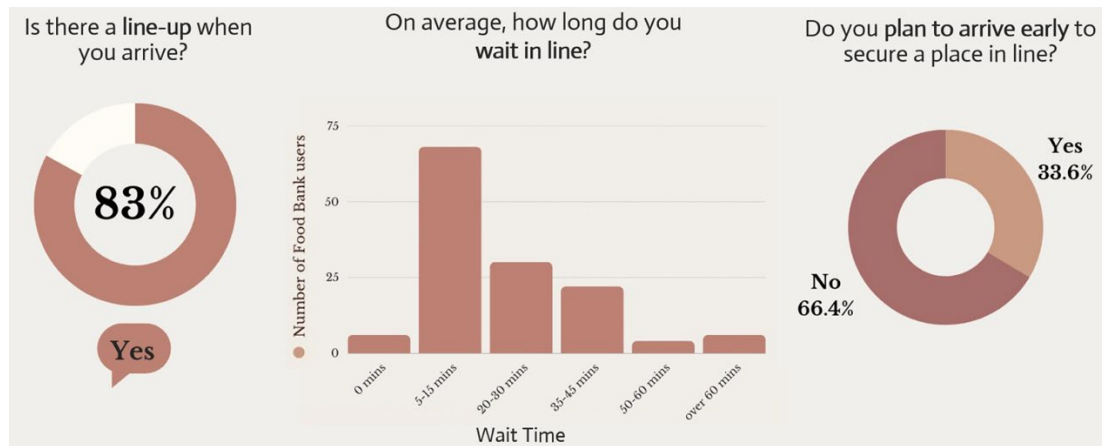
Figure 1 [The circle graphs in this image show the percentage of Yes or No responses to the questions quoted above. In the bar graph, each bar represents an answer option and bar height represents the number of people who selected the answer.]

Given a written response option to elaborate on arriving early, the most common responses focused on the selection, the line, and their schedules. Selection was mentioned most often, with descriptions of a better selection when visiting earlier in the day, or the opposite, having less options or food running out later in the day. The length of the line was also a key topic of response. Users described not liking to stand in line, planning their visit depending on the length of the line, or not wanting to be at the end of the line. Class times and schedules were also mentioned. Some comments covered all three topics, for example, "I have classes so I use to visit (when in need) later in the day. But I noticed that there is never anything left. So, I came near the opening and saw there was a huge line already. Apparently, people line up 1-2 hours prior."

<u>Selection:</u>

When asked if they are happy with the selection of food items provided, 76.3% of users answered Yes. Users were asked to rank several combinations of items in order of preference, starting with a comparison of categories including Dairy, Vegetables, Protein, Grains, Legumes, and Herbs/Seasonings. Figure 2 shows how each item was placed. Dairy was ranked as the highest preference compared to other items, with 59 out of 126 votes. Protein was ranked second (38/126). Users placed Vegetables third (48/126), Grains fourth (63/126), Legumes fifth (55/126) and Herbs/Seasonings last, as the lowest preference (85/126).

Ranking by Preference

Vegetables

Highest Preference ·········►

Dairy — 1. (59/128)

Protein — 2. (38/128)

Vegetables — 3. (48/128)

Grains — 4. (63/126)

Legumes — 5. (55/126)

6. (85/126)

Lowest Preference ·········►

Herbs/ Seasonings
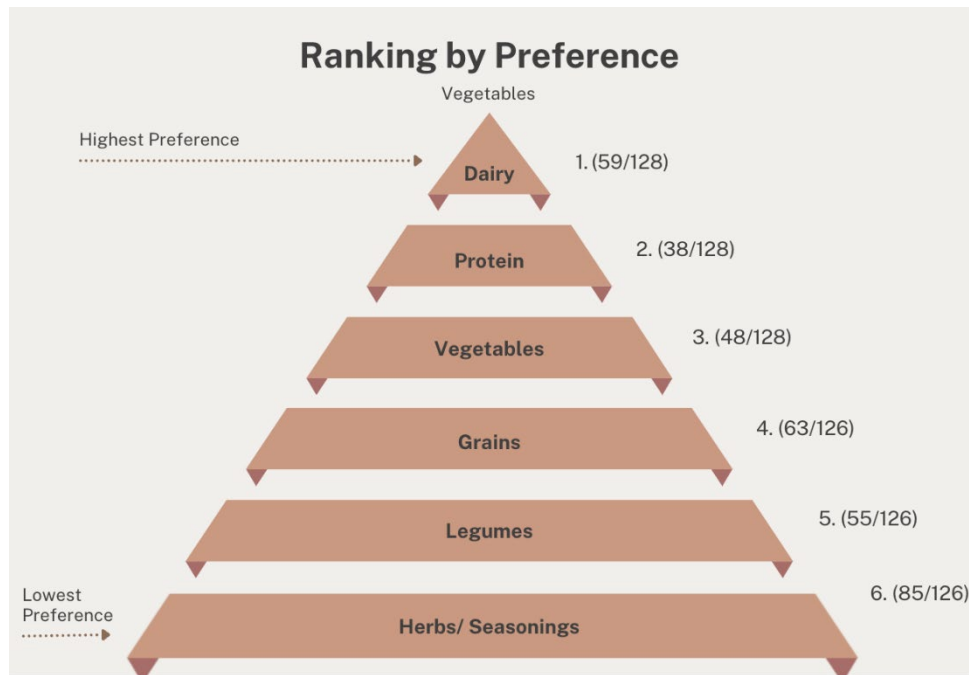
Figure 2. [Simplified visual of distribution of items weighted by votes in order of preference. The frequency of votes out of the total number of responses is provided beside the number of each ranking.]

For each individual category, items were ranked against each other for preference from highest to lowest. Starting with vegetables, users ranked 7 options: Bok Choy, Cabbage, Broccoli, Carrots, Tomatoes, Mushrooms, and Potatoes. The item selected for highest preference most often was Tomatoes, followed by Broccoli and Bok Choy. Mushrooms were the lowest priority for most users. In the category of protein foods, users ranked the following items: Tofu, Lentils, Chickpeas, Black beans, and Canned tuna. Tofu received the most votes for highest preference, while Canned tuna received the most votes for lowest preference.

Next, users were asked about the FB selection. As shown in Figure 3, most users (69%) have experienced the FB running out of an item before they arrived at least once, with the most common answer specifically being (28.8 %) 2-3 times. When asked, "How often do you worry that the Food Bank will run out of certain items before you visit," the most common response was Every time (37/131).

Figure 3. [From left to fight, the first 2 bar chart show the distribution of responses to the questions quoted above. The number of users who selected the answer is described by the height of each bar, while each bar de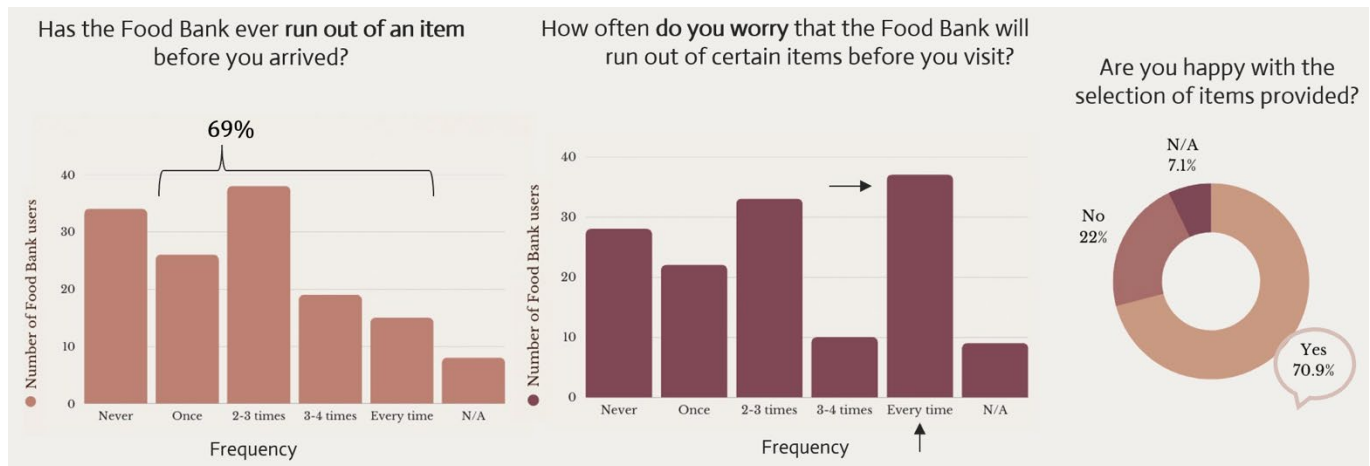scribes an available option provided for the users to select to answer the question. The circle chart on the right describes the percentage of users so answered Yes, No, or N/A to the question quoted above.]

Users typed out which items they experience running out the most. Meat and Protein were mentioned the most often, followed by Milk/Dairy, Fresh Fruit and Vegetables, Eggs, then Bread and Specialty items. Meat was by far of highest concern about running out, while Milk and Dairy were also mentioned often. Users were also somewhat worried about produce and eggs running out, with some mentions of bread, bakery, and specialty items.

Distribution Model & Atmosphere:

Out of 131 responses to whether users preferred the old or the new distribution model, 58% of users preferred the Stations model, while the remaining 42% preferred the Grocery Store model. When asked about the atmosphere within the FB, 73.5% of users described feeling comfortable and calm, while 22.7% of users felt uncertain and uncomfortable within the foodbank. 5 respondents chose Other and typed a written response. One said, "Now with the stations it makes the process feel less dignified. Having people hand you food and telling what you can or cannot have is rather sadly demeaning for me."

Users were asked how they felt the FB space could be improved. Size (ex. Larger) was selected the most often with 46.2% of the responses, 28% felt the current space is fine as is, and 6 users selected Other and offered a typed response. Suggestions provided by users for improving the FB space included a more user-friendly organization of the snack area, so users can better see what's available. One user also said the volunteers can be

judgmental. Another goes into detail about their experience saying, "...For those who have class and it ends at around 11:15 will have no choice but to line up for a minimum of 40 minutes after arrival, with the risk of run-out items, and a rush to another class at around 1:30. Sometimes if the line is too long, there is [a possibility] of just skipping the Food Bank."

<u>Meeting User Needs:</u>

Users were asked, "How confident are you that the Food Bank will be able to provide what you need during each visit?" The most common responses were Somewhat (42/129) and Moderate (38/129), while Very worried was chosen the least (4/129). Users provided written responses to describe why they felt the way they did about the Food Bank's ability to meet their needs. While many comments were negative, there were various positive comments as well. Users mentioned the selection of items in a negative way most often, writing that earlier visitors receive preference and mentioning unbalanced varieties or food items running out. One anonymous user wrote, "There are always same items. I am grateful but each time I only get pasta, tuna, chickpea, milk, potatoes, 6 eggs and onion. I wish there could be variety. I also don't eat pork but most of the meat options are pork if not expired. One time they offered me expired sushi? If I had not noticed, I could have been sick. It is dangerous and items date should be checked." They also expressed an understanding of the Food Bank's limited resources, saying the need for groceries seems to surpass the Food Bank's supply and that there are a lot of people in need. Many comments were positive as well, with users showing gratitude for getting their basic needs met, kind volunteers, and being helped in their time of need. One user wrote, "They do the best they can according to what is available, and I am thankful for that."

We asked directly if the FB is meeting users' needs. 75% responded Yes, while the other 25% said No. Users were given a typed response option to explain how the FB could better meet their needs. The most common sentiment was wanting more items in general. Responses ranged from improved variety of fresh produce, to providing more meat, milk, eggs, and general variety like Halal, Tofu, and larger portions for families.

Summary:

The main themes which emerged from our survey data indicated that users were most concerned about the food item selection and waiting in line. Some users prefer to visit early to access a wider selection, while others visit once the line has shortened and sacrifice their chance to receive certain specialty items. Wait times range by time of day and seem to be linked with the selection of specialty items or class schedules. Dairy was the item of highest priority, while the meat was consistently mentioned as a desirable item throughout all sections of the survey. While users showed gratitude for what is offered, they consistently requested additional variety. The tofu was placed first for protein preference, while canned tuna was placed last. Tomatoes were placed first in preference for vegetables, while mushrooms were last. Many users experienced items running out before their visit, referring mostly to meat and dairy. The new distribution model is preferred over the old model by a slight majority. Most users felt calm and comfortable within the space, while others had poor experiences regarding a loss of dignity or judgmental volunteers. Users are somewhat confident in the Food Bank's ability to meet their needs, based on past experiences, concern about the growing demand for groceries, and preferred items running out. In general, most users feel that FB is meeting their needs to the best of its abilities but would like to see a wider variety of items that remain available throughout the day.

3.3 FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

The following section contains results derived from the two focus groups with FB users. Within this data, there were several emergent themes which were used for coding purposes. They include Food Available, the Line Up, Feelings Around Visits, Interactions with Others, Comparisons Between the Old and New Model, and Expectations of the FB. Our focus group participants were anonymous, quotes will be differentiated by which focus group it came from: Day 1 or Day 2.

Before getting deeper into the focus group results, it is important to note that at the beginning of 2023 the distribution model for the FB was changed. It was a grocery store model where users picked items off the shelf independently during their visits. The new model is a stations model in which individual volunteers are responsible for giving out the allotted number of items to each user.

Additionally, to improve readability and more clearly present data, direct quotations will be presented integrated into the text for short individual quotes, separated from the text and italicized for long individual quotes, and as tables for multiple quotes with shared themes.

<u>Food Availability:</u>

As mentioned in the survey results, there are two main sectors of available food. First were items purchased by FB operators. Second were donated items over which operators have no control of quantity or quality. Our participants reported that purchased items consisted of eggs, milk, onions and potatoes. These were trusted to be available regardless of the time of day a user visited and were good quality (Table 1).

Table 1: Quotes about food availability

"The basics such as [ ] bread, milk and eggs. That's what I expect most and then, yeah, like we have potatoes and onion, maybe fruits. Just the basic[s]."	Day 1
"They usually typically have the basics or the consistent supply of [ ] your, like pasta, or rice and beans and tuna, and some potatoes and onions, like those basics."	Day 2

Basic items used to run out frequently, but this was mitigated by the implementation of the new model. However, donated items still run out and are of a lower quality. These items, like bread and meat were often nearing or at their best-before dates. These run out within the first few hours that the FB is open. One participant noted that they avoided donated meat because "it's always... a little questionable" (Day 1) and that some items were "starting to discolor" (Day 1). As for their availability, these items are depleted after a few hours. Those who line up get more items from each visit than those who do not. Increased selection based on time of day was an important factor behind line ups (Table 2).

Table 2: Quotes about food availability based on time of day

"If you go early enough, you're able to get most of the basic resources plus some extras [...], but if you have to come later in the day, you might just be left with just some like milk, egg, some like potatoes, onions."	Day 2
"It's just if you go bit early then, yeah, you can get so many options."	Day 1

Participants also noted that they sometimes had difficulties in creating meals from available ingredients. This was due to cultural differences or uncertainty about how to combine available options (Table 3).

Table 3: Quotes about uncertainty regarding preparing meals

"Yeah, it's a pretty difficult when you['re] coming from the diet that's mostly meat rich. So, you're kind of like struggling with finding alternatives for the protein."	Day 2
"I was upset every time I look at a recipe, I'm, like, 'I have to have everything on this list or it's not going to be as good. It's gonna [sic] be trash.'"	Day 2

These experiences led to a suggestion that the FB provide recipes: "This is what we have. This is a combination of what you could get... It would minimize decision making. Because you go, [thinking] I am already started on this recipe. And that's what I need to get" (Day 2). However, this was not a universal experience. One user described their method for putting together a meal with mismatched ingredients: "if I don't really have anything that matches the recipe completely, I just throw everything in a pot" (Day 2).

Waiting Periods and Lines:

This section will cover user experience while waiting in line, and the decision behind deciding whether or not to wait. To start, there were a variety of reasons why certain users chose to wait in line or not. One participant indicated that because they appreciated meat products, they chose to go early: "I'm a big meat guy. So, I'm ecstatic when they have meat. And that's why I gotta [sic] go early" (Day 2). Others were willing to wait because they believed they would get mote food if they were able to arrive early: "So either you tolerate the long line and get more of a variety, or just like the other way, like you save some time, but you don't have much to, to take" (Day 1). Reasons for deciding not to wait involved class schedules and feeling that waiting was not worth it (Table 4).

Table 4: Quotes about scheduling FB visits

"You have classes and whatnot. So, I would just rather, I mean, come back later, at a different time. Yeah, probably in the afternoon."	Day 1
"So, like last term, it was easier for me to go early enough because I didn't have to classes during those days. So, but this time, I have to go later in the day, and I found out the difference."	Day 2

During the focus groups, feelings around waiting in line were also discussed. One participant said, "I reflect on my poverty every time in the lines" and that every time they waited, they thought, "one day, I hope that I don't have to do this anymore" (Day 1). However, they also noted that since the new model was incorporated there were shorter lines and therefore less time for those feelings to crop up: "It's nice when there isn't a line so I don't think about, like being poor" (Day 1). However, this was not a universal experience. Other FB

users did not feel that waiting in the lines posed a burden. They needed this service and did not mind waiting

during their visits:

"It's not like it's something they're obliged to do besides if it is something that you want to get some help. So, I

don't mind waiting in the line until it's my turn" (Day 2).

Also, one user stated that when waiting with friends or doing schoolwork the lines were not a waste of time:

"I'm accompanied by my friends. So, you know, we have, like, a group and we can actually do something in that

time. Or just chat" (Day 1).

Feelings Around Visits:

When asked their feelings about visits to the FB, clients responded with gratitude. They felt relieved and

happy because they were able to save money on groceries or reduce their working hours:

Table 5: Quotes about positive feelings regarding FB visits:

"It helps your mental health – you don't have to be thinking so much about where's this food going to be coming from. Even if you have to do some grocery shopping, [it's] just gonna [sic] be few things, you know? Yeah. It gives you a wonderful feeling."	Day 2
"One day, one of my friends said that they're giving the food, then I went and collected. I felt so happy. After that [I] actually started reducing my working hours."	Day 2

It was also noted that the streamlined decision-making process was less stressful than making decisions at

the grocery store:

"There's like 20 different things, and it's causing a lot of friction. And so that also causes a lot more stress. And I

think that also is like why going to the grocery store is so stressful. So many options. So many decisions to make.

So, it helps a lot in that way" (Day 2).

The location on campus was also considered convenient for students:

"I live far from campus. And so just knowing that, okay, after my classes, I don't

have to, like, go to another place. I can just walk, I don't know, 10 minutes, and then get some

stuff, and I'll be good" (Day 2).

We also uncovered feelings about expired or near expired products that were being distributed. Some felt

poorly about these items as it felt like they were receiving scraps or that the food might not be good for children

(Table 6).

Table 6: Quotes about negative feelings regarding past-date foods

"I'm tired of people with means giving away their trash to feel better. Like, one day, I hope I don't have to eat rotting food. You know what I mean?"	Day 1

"The date has passed. Yeah, the date [has been] passed [by] many days. Not good for children."	Day 2

Others felt good about these items because they were able to prevent food waste. waste and that if the food looked and smelled safe, they had no problem eating it (Table 7).

Table 7: Quotes about positive feelings regarding past-date food.

"But still, a lot of grocery stores and [foods] are, like, one day past expired, it just goes into trash. And it's still perfectly fine. Like, that kills me. And yeah, so I don't care. I feel kind of, like, almost good. Because I'm saving, because I feel like I'm kind of saving food."	Day 2
"I saw [food] past expiration date in the actual grocery store as well. So, it's kind of like it's a lot of work for people you can pick those things out."	Day 1
"I don't check the expiry dates because [I'm] not bothered about that [...]. So far, so good. Because I think we're taking the food from Food Bank, they're not expecting the luxury."	Day 2

Finally, there was significant confusion around the number of visits a person could make each semester.

This part of the transcript was unintelligible because participants began talking over one another, but they all had different ideas about how often they could come.

Interactions With Others:

A decreased sense of competition was noted with the new model. More volunteers allowed greater control over item distribution, which prevented users from taking more than their allotted share (Table 8).

Table 8: Quotes about changes between current and past model

"It's a little more controlled in the sense of like, saying I'm a family when in reality of an individual. So, there's still a little bit of [lying] it seems, but [it's] definitely a lot more regulated."	Day 2
"I think because in the past, people would go in and, like, take more than they're supposed to...Yeah, and this time, at least there's people kind of like making sure everyone's taking what they need. I feel like less like feral about like, 'oh god where's my food coming from' and less the mean about it all."	Day 1

Volunteers were reported to be welcoming and friendly. However, one user indicated that volunteers could be condescending (Table 9).

Table 9: Quotes about Volunteer interactions

"It's like very, very harsh attitude, without any tolerance of, like, asking even a question."	Day 1
"It's the tone and, like, the way they're giving you [an] explanation. Like you should know this stuff[...]. Such an attitude [ ], acting like they're in some type of authority."	Day 1

Volunteers also reportedly chatted with one another and not greeting users, making them feel alienated:

"Maybe chatting with each other and not really talking to you. Yeah, or they'll talk to me, but they won't like forming the conversation or anything like personnel which I get, like, as we have to get through the line and stuff... kind of like you're intruding on them" (Day 1).

One story shared by a participant about waiting in line is listed below:

"One time, I was standing in line and I this, these two guys walked past. And I heard one guy comment. And he goes, Oh, they should play really depressing music down this hallway. I was like, what? That's so I don't know, like that kind of mindset of the Food Bank is so negative. And I think a lot of people do tend to have that. Now, I think I did. Until I realized that. Like, I'm in need of it. A lot of people are in need of it. It's not any, like a depressing or intense thing. Or sad at all" (Day 2).

Comparison With the Past Model:

Overall, there was an overwhelming preference for the stations model. This was due to reduced wait times, a lessened sense of competition, and increased selection (Table 10).

Table 10: Quotes comparing the new model to the old model

"Overall, it's a very different experience compared to what I had last term."	Day 1
"Since the question was 'is there any improvement compared to last term?' On that side, I'd say there's a huge improvement."	Day 1
"In comparison with the new model right now, I think this is actually better [than the old model]. Because last time last term, it was more, like free for all, [...] you could pick as much as you wanted."	Day 2
"There's not so much competition, kind of. I, yeah. Because people don't know, people don't really get away with literally ransacking the place."	Day 2

Expectations Around the Food Bank:

When asked about their expectations around the FB, clients were hesitant to say they expected anything. This was because they felt the FB did not have any obligation to provide this service:

"I honestly feel really uncomfortable with like, saying that I expect this this this or asking for more because I just I don't feel comfortable doing that. Because they don't really have any requirement to do anything. And yeah, I don't think it's something you should really take for granted like that" (Day 2).

Most relied on the Food Bank for their basic grocery items, or as a supplement to their other grocery shopping (Table 11).

Table 11: Quotes about expectations around Food Bank

"[For] Me it's more like something that kind of like a supplementary to my grocery shopping. Like when I'm close by and just easy for me to just take a look of what they have. That's at least, for me, how I use it. So, I don't have very particular expectation."	Day 1

"[I] Don't know how to say [it] so it will come off as being entitled, you know, I mean, this is kind of like, help out a bailout for, I mean, most persons. So, I wouldn't expect them to provide everything I need. But I mean, the basic things have been provided. So, something you could basically throw together to make breakfast, maybe just quick lunch."'	Day 2

Summary

In all, the focus groups provided more detailed accounts of experiences at and feelings about the FB. These were separated into several key themes including Food Available, Waiting Periods/Lines, Feelings around Visits, Interactions with Others, Comparison with the Past Model, and Expectations around the FB. Few experiences were universal, but one thing that was generally agreed upon was that the new distribution model is preferable to the old one, and that recipes would be helpful.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 GAP ANALYSIS: ASPECTS OF THE FOOD BANK THAT CONTRIBUTE TO PERCEPTIONS OF SCARCITY

Our results identified several key themes reflected within our resource methods. The literature review provided substantial insights into a greater perspective of international FB users, whereas the Survey and Focus Groups we conducted were primarily targeted towards University Students. Based on these differences in target populations, we were surprised to find many similarities in their experience. On several occasions, UBC community members mirrored almost word for word the experiences outlined in international literature from years ago. Common concerns are discussed below.

Visit Experience

Results from the survey (Section 3.2) identified that long lines to access the FB are one of the primary drivers of user perceptions of scarcity. Many users reported that the sight of long lines may be a sign that FB stock is running low, and there might not be enough food left for them once they reach the front of the line. This theme can also contribute to a sense of competition among users, turning the line into a tense and hostile environment that affects not only users' perceptions of the FB but also their attitude toward fellow patrons.

Long wait times also allow users to reflect on their situation, which may cause internal conflict, as described in previous literature (Section 3.1) and our results (Section 3.2). Some users reported that they think about their poverty while waiting in line, which may lead to them feeling pessimistic or angry when visiting the FB. In addition, many patrons have reported shame or embarrassment when utilizing the FB and waiting in line where other, seemingly more well-off students can see them only amplified these emotions. This finding aligns with the study by Swales et al. (2020) which highlights that this time spent in line provides an opportunity to be seen and observed by others, in addition to a space to reflect on one's financial capital. These negative emotions can exacerbate the perceptions of scarcity and impact the overall user experience.

Furthermore, our primary research discovered that prior negative experiences at the FB could often linger, leading to many clients forming perceptions of scarcity despite changes to the distribution model aimed at increasing stock. As identified in a study by May and colleagues (2019), when a person first enters the FB, there is already a sense of scarcity in their thinking, which may be reinforced by their interactions and experiences within the space. Furthermore, Patrons' dependence on the FB leaves many to remember the times when the service was unable to meet their needs and they did not receive enough food. Thus, these memories can worsen their perceptions of scarcity and leave many users wondering if the FB will not be able to support them again. Such thoughts can even lead to a vicious cycle that perpetuates the long line due to many users believing waiting will increase their chances of receiving better quality food; since the line is its own driver of the perceptions of scarcity, this cycle creates a positive feedback loop that only worsens the visit experience and causes many users to lose faith in the FB.

<u>Selection and Quality</u>

The survey (Section 3.2) and focus group (Section 3.3) results indicated that the perception of food scarcity can be caused by two major factors – limited food choices and poor food quality. Food choice and quality are two intertwined issues that influence the food choices made by users. Some respondents reported that the lack of variety in available food and food past its best-before date were the main issues, making it challenging to

prepare meals that met their dietary, nutritional, and culturally appropriate needs. The variety of food also decreases over time, which is another potential cause of queuing.

When the food selection is low, FB users may need support finding adequate variety to meet their needs, especially if they have specific dietary requirements or personal cultural food preferences. Some users reported that they have difficulty making meals with the food provided by FB, which resulted in fewer food selections that they can make. This data is supported by a 2018 review done in high-income nations by Middleton et al. where it discovered that limited variety and low-quality items were FB users' main concerns, stating the FB selection was unfavorable. Furthermore, some users also reported that arriving late may result in a limited food selection, with only onions and potatoes available for selection. This barrier can lead to feelings of frustration, dissatisfaction, and a sense of food insecurity and food scarcity among FB users.

Food past the best before date makes users feel that they are not treated appropriately. Specifically, some users reported feeling stigmatized and marginalized when receiving food that was offered after the best by date. One focus group comment highlighted that these emotions arise because they feel they are not being treated or do not deserve the same level of respect as other normal individuals who can access fresh food in grocery stores. In which poor selection and quality can often undermine recipients' self-worth and elicit fear of humiliation, thereby acting as a barrier to accessing the FB (van der Horst et al., 2014). Additionally, clients who request more or changes are perceived as abusing the system or lacking gratitude (Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003). Thus, these actions within the FB furthers perceptions of scarcity among recipients when accessing this service.

<div align="center">Interactions</div>

The survey, focus groups, and literature review identified that interactions with other FB users, volunteers, and non-FB recipients could drive feelings of competition, indignity, and shame, respectively. However, it was reported by several respondents that with the change in the distribution model, there had been a decline in these adverse interactions. Nonetheless, analyzing these experiences can help prevent these incidents from reoccurring. As a result, this exploration can lower the perceptions of scarcity, maintain low barriers to emergency food access, and meet the needs of FB users.

When examining interactions with other FB users, we recognized that lines and observing other recipients taking more than the allotted number of items created competition among users. This sense of competition, thereby, propelled individuals to line up early to ensure enough food to meet their needs. This finding was supported by responses in both the survey and focus groups, in which recipients claimed that knowing people line up before operational hours and seeing long queues pushed them to line up early to have access to a "better selection". Therefore, this sense of competition also perpetuates feelings of scarcity, as users noted that because there are so many people in need, the FB may not be able to accommodate everyone.

In addition, interactions with FB volunteers can inflict feelings of indignity as there is often a power imbalance between the provider and the receivers. Some survey respondents noted this issue, where volunteer interactions were impersonal and demeaning, where volunteers' behaviours were "snappy" and judgemental. Specifically, when one user explained that with the stations, "it feels less dignified, having people hand you food and telling you what you can or cannot have", highlighting this power dynamic between volunteers and recipients. As a result, this loss of autonomy and indignity can perpetuate perceptions of scarcity as FB users feel inclined to receive what is offered without complaints due to the lack of control (Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003). Furthermore, these actions of forced compliance and gratitude can prevent the FB from meeting user needs.

Lastly, interactions with non-FB users can arouse feelings of shame when accessing the FB. One comment from the focus group brought this to our attention: "One time, I was standing in line, and these two guys walked past. And I heard one guy comment. And he goes, they should play really depressing music down this hallway". These interactions can undermine human dignity and invoke humiliation (Swales et al., 2020), driving individuals from accessing the FB despite requiring emergency food aid. Therefore, by preventing these incidents from occurring, it can help the FB maintain low barriers to emergency food access.

<u>Summary</u>

One of our primary goals for our project was to identify the causes of the perceptions of scarcity at the AMS Food Bank (Section 1.4). From our research, we identified that the main drivers of users' perceptions of

scarcity are related to their visit experience, the selection and quality of the food available, and interactions with other individuals at the FB (including other patrons, staff, and volunteers). To mitigate the perceptions of scarcity that decrease efficacy and efficiency at the FB, these three themes must be addressed. Doing so will help achieve the purpose of our study (Section 1.4) and help the FB maintain low barriers to emergency food access for the UBC community.

4.2 LIMITATIONS

<u>Survey Limitations</u>

Recall bias is an inherent risk with any survey, but its presence must be acknowledged as a limitation of our study. Recall bias occurs when study participants erroneously provide responses that depend on their ability to reflect on and recall past events (Althubaiti, 2016). As such, our results could have been affected by FB users providing inaccurate information when filling out the survey. Perhaps one cause of recall bias is that the survey was intended to be completed while FB users waited in the line; thus, they may have reported their attitudes about the line as being more negative than other parts of the FB (e.g., the selection of food – which was discussed more in our focus group that was held across campus from the FB) since they were experiencing those emotions while filling out the survey. Had the users taken the survey in another environment (e.g., at their home), the distribution of responses could have been skewed differently.

Another limitation with our survey that may have impacted our results was users giving inaccurate responses to be presented in a certain manner. Although we made sure to emphasize that the survey was anonymous (i.e., no identifying information was collected) on our poster (Appendix B), we failed to disclose that our team was not affiliated with the FB and no staff members would see their personal responses. As such, users could have tailored their answers to be different from their actual attitudes to ensure that they will continue to be able to use the FB. Such inaccurate responses could have impacted our results by having users underestimate how much certain areas of the FB impact their perceptions of scarcity, causing us to focus our recommendations elsewhere.

<u>Focus Group Limitations</u>

One of the principal limitations with our focus group was the possibility of moderator bias. The goal of moderators is to remain neutral when facilitating a discussion, but bias can occur when they impose their own ideas or language on the group and influence participant responses (Tynan & Drayton, 1988). However, we may have been unaware of our own biases during the focus groups due to our limited amount of moderation experience. We noticed that many focus group participants seemed to respond with positive statements to questions based on areas of the FB that the survey had identified as contributing to perceptions of scarcity, and they only spoke critically when slightly encouraged by the moderator to do so. Instances such as these may have shaped their responses, and our focus group results.

A second limitation with the focus group was that our sample did not represent all FB patrons. After our first meeting with the FB operators in January 2023, we were given a demographics report from July 2022 that was conducted by the FB itself. We hoped to get a sample for the focus group that was representative of the data in this report (e.g., many international and graduate students, as they rely heavily on the FB) since their personal feedback could aid us in developing our recommendations which address the perceptions of scarcity that affect most users. However, after we emailed all the survey respondents who indicated they would like to participate in the focus group, we received only limited replies confirming their interest. Thus, the focus groups consisted of the few individuals who replied to us when we emailed them about participating, which may not have been representative of FB usage as a whole. This discrepancy may have skewed our results to not be representative of the actual demographics of the broader UBC community that relies on FB.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

The survey and focus groups validated the need for changes to the selection, experience, and interactions at the FB. Overall, user feedback highlighted the demand for enhanced variety, increased food literacy,

confidence in the FB, and safer interactions. Furthermore, these desires also overlap with the FB operators' goals of gathering more feedback from recipients and increasing the ability of the FB to meet user needs. Therefore, recommendations for lowering food scarcity and enhanced visit experiences for FB users include the following approaches:

5.1.1 SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS (WITHIN 3 MONTHS)

1. Selection Improvement: Increase the variety of options by weekly or biweekly substitution of staples with items of similar price point.

- *Selection/Quality* — Throughout our research, we received many inputs regarding the selection and quality of items provided by the FB; thereby we determined that there could be improvements surrounding the variety. As 22% of survey respondents reported not being satisfied with the selection offered at the FB, where many FB recipients requested for more halal options and tofu in both the survey and focus groups. This data led us to consider the variety of items provided at the FB. We decided that since the FB has financial constraints in expanding food selection, switching out the staple items with minor substitutions may better meet these needs while staying within the constraints. The following are some suggestions we feel may help achieve the FB's goals:
    - With our review of the bulk prices of items offered at Walmart, substituting lentils for chickpeas would be of similar cost while increasing the feelings of abundance and variety.
- *Visit Experience* — Furthermore, increasing the variety of the FB that satisfies users' demands can enhance feelings of abundance and reduce feelings of shame and indignity. Douglas et al. determined that FB recipients' "resigned lack of choice" and "effusive expressions of gratitude" for the food and assistance they obtained from the Food Bank personnel highlighted a profound sense of disempowerment. Therefore, this recommendation can allow for a more dignified access to food while lowering the perceptions of scarcity.

2. Food Bank Recipes: Offer biweekly recipes based on the available items at the FB.

- *Selection/Quality* —— The lack of ability to create meals from the items provided at the FB can create feelings of scarcity. This issue was brought to our attention in the focus groups with two participants stating their emotions when they receive inadequate items for a recipe, where they feel the meal would not meet their needs due to not having everything on the list, resulting in the meal being trashed. The lack of knowledge on making palatable meals with the provided items can increase the perception of scarcity (Douglas et al., 2015). Therefore, we determined that these recipes could support users in creating meals with the offered items and more efficiently identifying which ingredients are required. Implementing these recipes can mend any gaps in nutritional and culinary knowledge, combating feelings of uncertainty (Kleczynski, 2014). This increase in confidence and comfort with the items users receive can lower perceptions of scarcity.

- *Visit Experience* —— As responses in the survey highlighted, long lines can create space for adverse interactions with non-FB recipients in line that invoke feelings of shame and judgement. This recommendation can help reduce the time required for users to decide on items and inform users of the available stapes prior to attending, thus resulting in a shorter line and time in queue. A survey respondent mentioned that they walk 2km from their home to access the FB; therefore, if they were informed of the items ahead of time, they could plan their trip accordingly. This reduction in line can also prevent the vulnerability recipients feel when queuing and prevent any negative interactions between non-FB recipients and users.

3. Feedback Voting System: Incorporate a voting system so that users can incorporate their voices into Food Bank decisions during each visit.

- *Selection/Quality* —— A method of enhancing the ability to meet the needs of its users and operators is to identify these needs before addressing them. Additionally, a concern raised by our clients was the lack of feedback collected from FB users. Thus, a feedback voting system can determine users' needs to establish changes within the clients' capacity. This recommendation can further reduce the perception of scarcity as these options may better meet users' dietary demands. A study by Hamelin et al. (2002) highlights that

"freedom of choice" and "access to a variety of food" can increase the perception of having enough food. The following will highlight how this system works:

- This voting system poses a question to FB users and requests them to vote using their cards. For instance, the FB can ask, "What product would you like to receive in the following week?" with the option of carrot or celery.

- Users who enter the FB receive cards that state family or single status.

- Then as they finish their visit, they can insert their card into voting boxes to select one of the provided options.

5.1.2 MEDIUM- AND LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS (WITHIN 1 YEAR)

4. Food Bank Signage: Provide signage around the FB to clarify guidelines and usage allowances.

- *Visit Experience* — Another recommendation is creating FB signage and updating the AMS FB webpage, which can help clarify guidelines and rules. The focus group revealed a discrepancy in the understanding of how many visits were allowed, in which multiple participants believed in a different number of visits per semester. Therefore, these methods can clarify by highlighting how many visits are permitted every semester and other guidelines. As a result, this accessible clarity can further the confidence users have in the ability of the FB to meet their needs.

- *Visit Experience (Line up)* — Furthermore, the survey highlighted that one factor that affects users' decision to access the FB is to check how many visits they have left in the term. Thus, this clarification can shorten lines and lower the impression of scarcity as users can plan their trips more respectively.

5. Enhancing Volunteer Interactions: Provide sensitivity training and a policy for volunteers to promote respect and empathy towards FB users.

- *Interactions* — Our final recommendation is for the FB organisers to reiterate volunteer training and implement a policy for volunteers to prevent negative interactions and the FB that may provoke feelings of indignity. Studies show that many interactions with FB volunteers humiliated users, as recipients did not believe the volunteers took their poverty experiences seriously and upheld the "compulsory

gratitude" they were expected to express in receipt of their food (Douglas et al., 2015). This finding

aligned with several survey responses which claim that volunteers were judgemental and that

interactions with them made users feel "embarrassed" and "poor".

- o Therefore, introducing a policy for volunteers that endorses dignified access to food, free of
  discrimination, prejudice, and pomposity, can enable users to feel more welcomed and safer
  when accessing the FB. As a result, these actions can enhance the overall experience at the FB
  and maintain low-barrier emergency food access.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Throughout our research, two areas where further research is necessary have emerged, including the psychology

of the line and the drivers of campus food insecurity.

Psychology of the line:

It is crucial to investigate the psychology behind the formation of the line. We identified the line as one of

the preeminent causes of perceptions of scarcity because it promotes a sense of competition between users over

the seemingly scarce food selection. However, we needed to determine what specific aspects of the line were

causing these feelings. Thus, it is crucial to identify the sources promoting this competitive mindset to change

how users perceive the line and the FB. As one of the most cited barriers when accessing the FB, finding ways to

improve users' feelings about waiting in line while promoting a sense of food surplus is a crucial step in

eliminating the perceptions of scarcity and improving the efficacy of the service.

Underlying causes of Food Insecurity on College Campuses:

More research must be conducted to determine the underlying causes of food insecurity on college

campuses. The goal of the FB is to provide *emergency* food access to help alleviate the consequences of food

insecurity. However, when Food Banks become the solution to directly addressing food insecurity by providing

users with a large proportion of their weekly foodstuffs, user demand can outweigh the supply and lead to

perceptions (or realities) of scarcity. Furthermore, a study by Loopstra and Tarasuk (2012) highlights that only

23% of the 278 participants in low-income households identified as food insecure had accessed a FB. Thus, emergency food assistance can promote undignified access to food while providing the image that food insecurity is being addressed. As such, it is paramount to do further research into the drivers of food insecurity in order to reduce user reliance on the FB. Finding novel ways to support the UBC community's food sovereignty will help lessen the strain on the FB by reducing overall reliance on the service. Thus, striking at the leading causes of food insecurity for most UBC students, staff, and faculty can reduce the number of users accessing the service, allowing the FB to support individuals who need food aid the most.

6. CONCLUSION

Over the course of four months, our work on this project included primary and secondary data collection. Conducting the literature review allowed us to gain insight on how we should approach our project. We identified key factors that contribute to food insecurity and used them to guide the survey and focus group design. From our data collection we learned that common drivers of feelings of scarcity include long lines, limited variety, and uncertainty about how to prepare meals from food. In addition, we were able to gain a deeper understanding of experiences at the FB including interactions with volunteers and reflections about food insecurity. With these results, we generated a comprehensive food deprivation analysis among AMS Food Bank users and developed five strategies to address these issues to reduce barriers to emergency food access for AMS Food Bank users.

We believe that the deliverables of our project will mitigate some of the consequences of food insecurity and build food sovereignty in the UBC community. In addition, building strong relationships between the FB and its users can go a long way in ensuring that the needs of both operators and users are understood and met. As a result, the wellbeing of the campus community will be promoted and the consequences of food insecurity on the UBC campus will ultimately be alleviated.

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APPENDICES
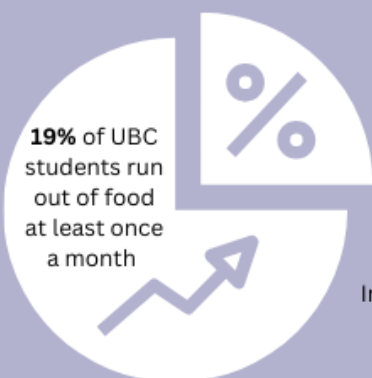
APPENDIX A: PRACTITIONER SUMMARY INFOGRAPHIC

THE
AMS Food Bank

Evaluating the efficacy of the AMS Food Bank in times of increasing usage and need.

BACKGROUND

The AMS Food Bank provides emergency food services to the UBC community, including students, faculty, and staff, to help alleviate food insecurity.

19% of UBC students run out of food at least once a month

600 visits to the food bank occured from February - March 2022

28.6% of Food Bank users are international students

International students are **4.1 times** more likely to experience food insecurity

IMPACT

Mental Health

Physical Health

Academic Performance

Work Performance

OUR GOAL:
Together with the AMS Food Bank team, our group aimed to develop a plan to reduce barriers to community access to food by helping the AMS Food Bank work more efficiently

METHODS

We used a 3 step approach

1 **LITERATURE REVIEW**
- Past AMS Data
- Published Journal Articles
- Public reports

2 **SURVEY**
- **144** responses
- Qualitative data
- Quantitative data

3 **FOCUS GROUPS**
- **2 - 1** hour discussions
- **11** participants total
- Qualitative data

RESULTS

Key themes emerged

- New distribution model is preferred

- Some confusion over visit allowances

- Interactions with volunteers are sometimes negative

- Perceptions of Scarcity may be effected by
  - Line-Up
  - Variety of Food
  - Quality of Food

RECOMENDATIONS

We believe that our recommendations will help Food Bank to lower the barriers to access emergency food services on UBC campus and improve overall wellbeing of UBC community.

01 SELECTION IMPROVEMENT

02 RECIPES

03 INFO. SIGNS

04 VOTING SYSTEM

05 VOLUNTEER TRAINING
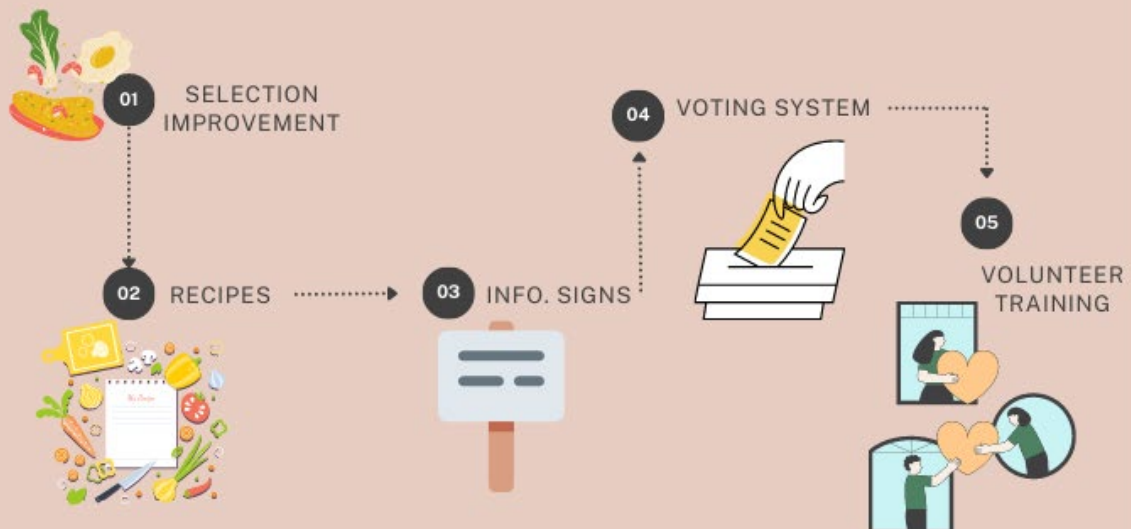
reallygreatsite.com

APPENDIX B: SURVEY ADVERTISEMENT & RECRUITMENT POSTER

APPENDIX C: QUALITATIVE SURVEY RESPONSE ANALYSIS & SUMMARY

Q 7: If you answered "Yes" to the previous question (Do you arrive early to secure a place in line), can you please elaborate on why?			
Themes:	Selection	Line	Schedule
Times mentioned:	19	10	4
Example Quotes:	Selection dwindles quickly so I get there early	To be able to avoid being at the end of the line. Mostly scared of not being able to get food for the week	I have classes so i use to visit (when in need) later in the day. But i noticed that there is never anything left. So i came near opening and saw there was a huge line already. Apparently people line up 1-2 hours prior
	To have a better chance of getting more or better foods	There is huge line when ai arrived so i have to plan early to come and secure a position, i also	(Only if personal schedule allows) To ensure there is still stock last

		thought there is limited food so	
	Can get better quality or various kinds of food when I arrive earlier	I don't like standing in lines	
	Because when you arrive late you cant really find good options or variety of food.	Other things to do in the day. Altho I just arrived around 2:45 and there was almost no line so I may start coming later	

Q 9: What factors affect your decision about when to visit the Food Bank?				
Themes:	Schedule & Class Time	Busy/ Line	Based on Need -Money -Food ran out	Selection
Times Mentioned:	44	21	18	10
Example Quotes:	I come according to my study schedule	How long I wait in line	The need for food	What is offered at the food bank, usually meat and other better options are offered in the begging and run out quickly. So if I was to go later it would be the same thing every time
	Class schedule, how long the line up is		When I have limited amount of money to spend on food or home rent	Possible line, thinking about selection/running out of food, personal schedule

Q 16: Which item(s) run out the most?					
	Meat & Protein	Milk & Dairy	Bread	Eggs	Fruit & Vegetables	Deli Food -bakery -specialty items
Times Mentioned:	37	16	9	11	12	9
Example Quotes:						Prepares food from supermarkets. Another thing meat or supermarket

						ready to eat food items are always expired. We do not deserve no eat expired food.

Q19: How does the interior of the Food Bank space make you feel? - Other (please specify):
(only a few responses)

Example Quotes:	Strange cuz people watched on me	Feels somewhat cold and factory-like, but I appreciate the swiftness	Now with the stations it makes the process feel less dignified. Having people hand you food and telling what you can or cannot have is rather sadly demeaning for me

Q 20: How could the Food Bank Improve their space?
(only a few responses)

Example Quotes:	The no bag as a place holder policy, for those who have class and it ends at around 11:15 will have no choice but to line up for a minimum of 40minutes after arrival, with the risk of run-out items, and a rush to another class at around 1:30. Sometimes if the line is too long, there is possibly of just skipping the food bank.	Volunteers can be judgemental	More user friendly orgenization of snack for selection so we can see which iteam is available to select, all else is perfect and thank you

Q 21: Why do you feel this way about the Food Bank's ability to provide what you need?

	Negative: Selection -diversity -items run out	Negative: Economic pressure -high demand -high food cost	Positive: Selection	Positive: Basic needs met	Positive: Gratitude
Times mentioned	27	9	6	6	7
Example Quotes:	Unbalanced varieties and earlier visitors's preference	High demand, high food costs, rely on donations	It always have good selections	The basic food is usually sufficient	They do the best they can according

					to what is available and I am thankful for that
	There is always same items. I am grateful but each time I only get pasta, tuna, chickpea, milk, patato, 6 eggs and onion. I wish there could be variety. I also don't eat pork but most of the meat options are pork if not expired. One time they offered me expired sushi? If I have not noticed, I could be sick. It is dangerous and items date should be checked.	It seems like the need for groceries surpasses the supply they have	It depends on daily diet needs, I think they are providing all food which is necessary to provide specific nutrients for surviving	I get everything I need	Food banks always provide all the necessary items which we use on daily basis. It help me a lot to survive in this hard situation. I am very thankful for that
	...However, for at least half of my visits, there were no proteins or desserts available, which significantly improve the quality and experience of my meals. Also, I am concerned with whether the food is safe to eat: I understand that it is safe for a few days after	Because I realize that there are a lot of people in need and they may not accommodate everyone			Regardless of the time I visit the food bank, it usually successfully provides me with eggs, milk, onions, and potatoes, which I use often in my meals...	

	its expiration date, but sometimes I have found mold on the food offered.				

Q 24: If no, what can the AMS Food Bank do or change to meet your needs better?				
	Improved Fruit and Vegetable options	More Meat	More (general): -Milk -Eggs -variety -funding	Add (general): -Halal -Tofu -larger family portion
Times Mentioned:	7	6	8	3
Example Quotes:	Make more vegetables available	Adding meat, chicken	I wish I was allowed to get more milk for my family.	Add new item like Tofu please, and at least have rice for us.
	Vegetables and fruits and less lines	Probably more frozen meats and fresh apples if possible	More than 6 eggs for families would be nice, but it's understandable why the change was made	Provide larger portions of food for families
	provide more fresh vegetables, fruits and protein instead of food nearing its expiration date			

Questions & Themes

1. General Program Usage: (4 questions)
    a. Do you use the AMS Food Bank?
        i. Yes
        ii. No
    b. How often do you use the Food Bank?

        i. Never

       ii. Once per term

     iii. Once per month

     iv. Once per week

      v. Twice per week

     vi. Other:

  c. How many dependents do you support with your visit to the Food Bank?

        i. None

       ii. One

     iii. Two

     iv. Three

      v. More than three

  d. What time of day do you usually visit the Food Bank?

        i. 12-1pm

       ii. 1-2pm

     iii. 2-3pm

     iv. 4-5pm

      v. 5-6pm

     vi. 6-7pm

2. Barriers: (5 questions)

  a. Is there a line-up when you arrive?

        i. Yes

       ii. No

  b. Do you plan to arrive early to secure a place in the line?

        i. Yes

       ii. No

  c. If yes, can you elaborate on why?

        i. Open Ended:

  d. On average, how long do you wait in line?

        i. 0 minutes

       ii. 5-15 minutes

     iii. 20-30 minutes

     iv. 35-45 minutes

      v. 50-60 minutes

     vi. Over 60 minutes

  e. What factors affect your decision about when to visit the food bank?

        i. Open ended:

3. Selection: (5 questions)

  a. Are you happy with the **selection** of items provided?

        i. Yes

       ii. No

  b. Rank the following in order of preferred availability:

        i. Dairy

       ii. Vegetables

           iii.   Protein
           iv.   Grains
           v.   Legumes
           vi.   Herb/Seasoning

c. Which vegetables would you prefer to see available (rank these items in order of preference)?
   i. Potatoes
   ii. Bok Choy
   iii. Cabbage
   iv. Broccoli
   v. Carrots
   vi. Mushrooms
   vii. Tomatoes

d. Which herbs/seasonings would you prefer to see available (rank items in order of preference)?
   i. Ginger
   ii. Scallions
   iii. Garlic
   iv. (None)
   v. Other (please specify):

e. Which items do you prefer to cook with (rank items in order of preference)?
   i. Tofu
   ii. Lentils
   iii. Chick peas
   iv. Black Beans
   v. Canned Tuna

4. Experience: (3 questions)

a. Has the Food Bank run out of an item before you arrived (ex. No cans of tuna left, etc…)?
   i. Never
   ii. Once
   iii. 2-3 times
   iv. 3-4 times
   v. Every time

b. How often do you worry that the Food Bank will run out of certain items before you visit?
   i. Never
   ii. Once
   iii. 2-3 times
   iv. 3-4 times
   v. Every time

c. Which item(s) run out the most?
   i. Open ended:

d. The AMS Food Bank recently changed their food distribution model. Do you prefer the stations model or the grocery store model?
   i. Stations Model

      ii. Grocery store Model

  e. How does the interior of the Food Bank space make you feel?

      i. Comfortable

      ii. Calm

      iii. Uncertain

      iv. Uncomfortable

      v. Other:

  f. How do you think the Food Bank could improve their space to make it more comfortable?

      i. Wall decorations (ex. wallpaper, art, etc...)

      ii. Ambience (ex. music)

      iii. Layout (ex. flow of movement in the room)

      iv. Size (ex. larger)

      v. N/A

      vi. Other suggestions:

5. Almost Done! (2 questions)

  a. How confident are you that the Food Bank will be able to provide what you need during each visit?

      i. Very confident

      ii. Somewhat confident

      iii. Moderate

      iv. Somewhat worried

      v. Very worried

  b. Why do you feel this way about the Food Bank's ability to provide what you need?

      i. Open ended:

  c. Do you feel like the AMS Food Bank meets your needs?

      i. Yes

      ii. No

         1. If no, what can the AMS Food Bank do or change to meet your needs better?

  d. Do you have any additional comments for the AMS Food Bank?

      i. Open ended:

6. RAFFLE

  a. Would you like to be entered into the gift card raffle? If so, please provide your e-mail address below: