

BFI Foodscape Mapping Project – Oral Histories
Category: Student Group Stories

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Transcription of excerpts of an interview conducted with

Esteban Vasquez

Berkeley, California

Organizational affiliation: Food Pantry

Vasquez:

So my name is Esteban Vasquez. I'm a junior business major here at UC Berkeley and I'm currently the finance coordinator for the basic needs security committee. So right now I manage all of our finances for our entities including the food pantry, the calfresh program, our teaching kitchens, and our campus gardens. The basic needs security committee has definitely impacted the trajectory of my career goals. Originally when I came to Cal I wanted to pursue business to get a good career and help the community and now I'm finding different ways to do that. I'm more interested in the nonprofit sector or the corporate socially responsible side of business and that's largely due to the work that I've done with the basic needs security committee. So at UC Berkeley in particular, the high cost of rent in the bay area has grown up exponentially coupled with costly text books and some students who may have to send money back home or don't receive financial aid package all contribute to students who don't feel food secure on campus. So some UC's have had food pantries in the past but what I think makes UC Berkeley so unique is that we have a holistic model to meet student's basic needs. So we have the food pantry, we have a food assistance program, we have calfresh clinics on campus and I feel like UC Berkeley is one of those campuses that the students are really passionate about what they do and they want to see greater impacts and we feel like we can have an impact on a global scale. The food pantry is open to all undergraduate and graduate students who are Cal students. We do not ask for any background information. All they need to do is use their Cal ID and all that information is privately held. We don't share any of that information. We just need to verify that you're a Cal student and you are freely use our food pantry. We do partner with the University Health Services, Nutritional Science and Toxicology Department. Actually, in NSD 10, we actually have lessons on food insecurity and talk about the food pantry so students in that class know about about our resources. I

think the UC Berkeley food pantry provides enough nutritious foods for students to supplement a meal and definitely emergency food relief. In terms of our greater model, we provide teaching kitchens, we provide nonperishable food items, we provide perishable food items, and we actually have freezer food items, and we try to serve culturally appropriate foods so we try to reach as large of a demographic as we can. The food pantry I volunteer at in my neighborhood, I mean, they helped me immensely and just remember vividly one experience in particular where I handed a family a box of fresh produce and nonperishable food items and I saw a four-year-old, he had to be about four years old, a boy got really excited to see raspberries in this box and raspberries are also my favorite food and he got really excited and that's when I realized, I'm like "man, this is something I want to continue long term and I want to have an impact on other communities".