

Campus Hunger : Bridging the Food Security Gap with Student Experiences

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“I left WSU because I couldn’t maintain my budget, mental health, and quality of life while in school ” - (Maddy, Class of 2027)



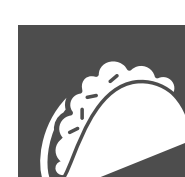
ABSTRACT

In 2022, roughly 40% of Washington State Students were found to be food insecure as defined by the Washington State Achievement Council, a rate three time the national average. Even more alarming is that specific demographics reported higher percentage points for food insecurity than the average: LGBTQ+ (55.4%), students with dependents (61.1%), and former foster and homeless youth (75.9%). To address this, universities have implemented student basic needs programs like food pantries. However, little is known about the ways students’ behavior, environment, and sociocultural characteristics define their relationship to food and food insecurity, and how interventions can address this.



OBJECTIVE

- Define the student experience with food
- Evaluate areas for upstream interventions instead of treatment like food pantries
- Compare the effectiveness of university efforts across the state for food insecurity



METHODOLOGIES

This project was a mixed methods approach combining qualitative semi-structured interviews, skill specific surveys, and a state-wide survey from the Washington State Achievement Council. In all, this data was interpreted in excel, R, and SPSS using descriptive and comparative statistics.

1 Semi-Structured Interviews (n=19)

2 Skills Based Surveys (n=21)

3 State-Wide Survey (n=475)



Interview and Survey Questions can be found here

More information about the Cougar Food Pantry is available at <https://bit.ly/4hYhIVu>

1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Figure 1. Interviewee Demographics

Demographics (n=19, 89% Female)

Class

Undergraduate 68% Graduate 32%

Food Insecure

Yes 84% No 16%

Race

White 37% Asian 26%

Latinx 21% Black 15%

Figure 2. Barriers to Normal Eating Habits

“When I bring a lunch, I have to carry it around all day, and if I don’t there is not cheap and healthy option on campus, only fast food.”

- (Sam, Class of 2026)

“Normally, I do not eat breakfast, I grab something as I runout. As for lunch, it is normally something I grab quick or from the pantry. Dinner is really my only regular meal. “

Figure 3. Biggest Barrier to Food Acquisition



3 State-Wide Comparison of Student’s Food Insecurity Experiences

Figure 7: Regions for the Washington State Experience Survey

Students experienced high rates of basic needs insecurity in all regions of the state.

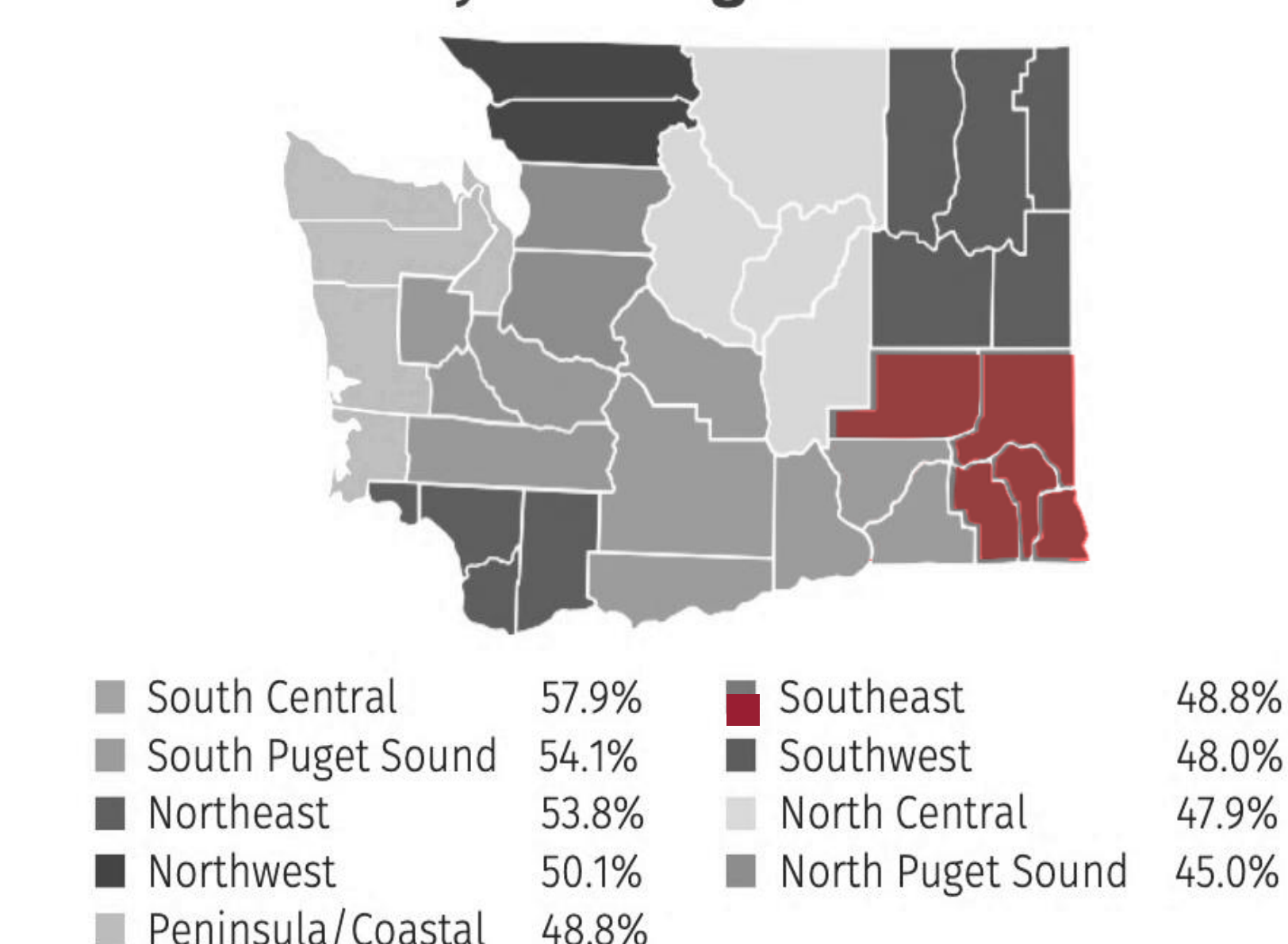
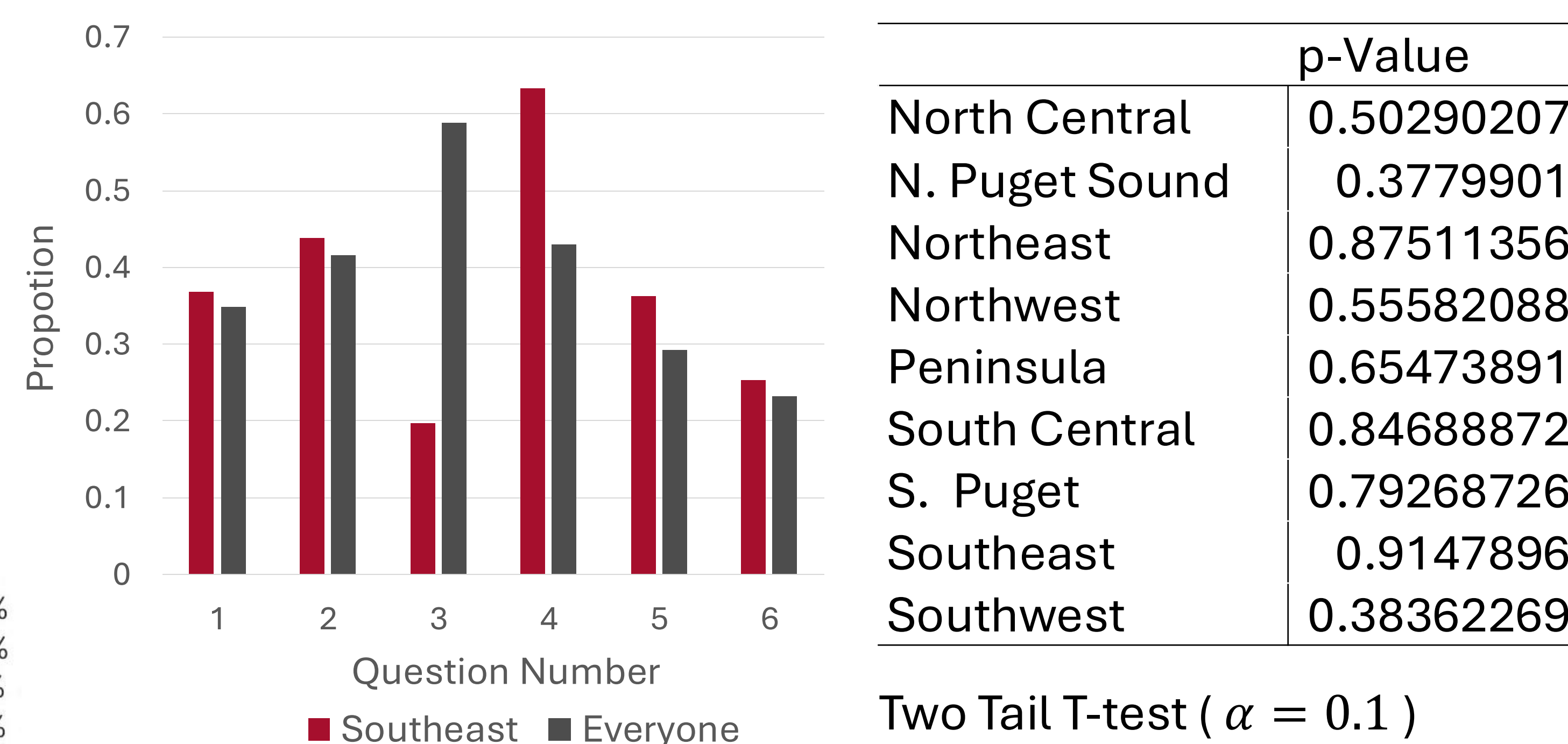


Figure 8: Students in the Southeastern Region have Unique Responses to the USDA Food Security Survey Module



2 Skills Based Surveys

Figure 4. What is the biggest challenge you face when it comes to food preparation?

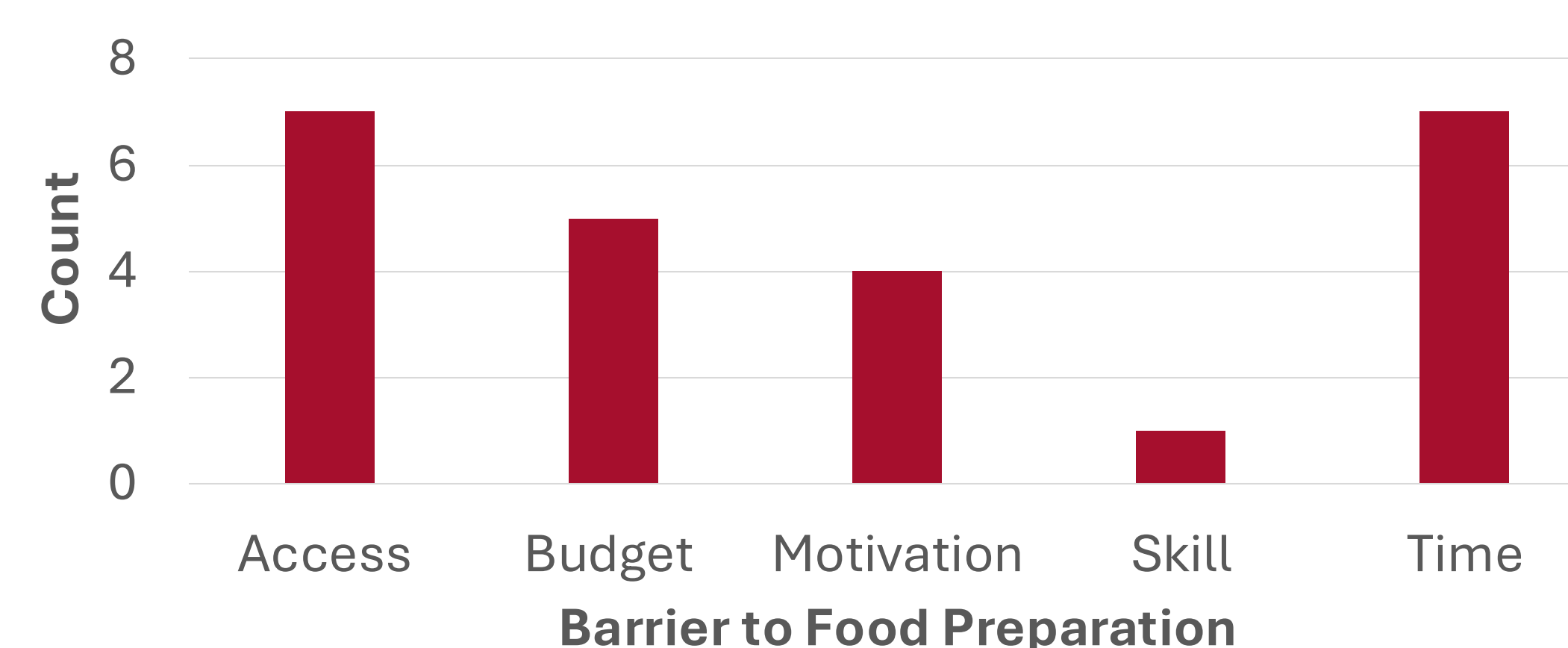


Figure 5. Which of the following financial topics are you least familiar with ?

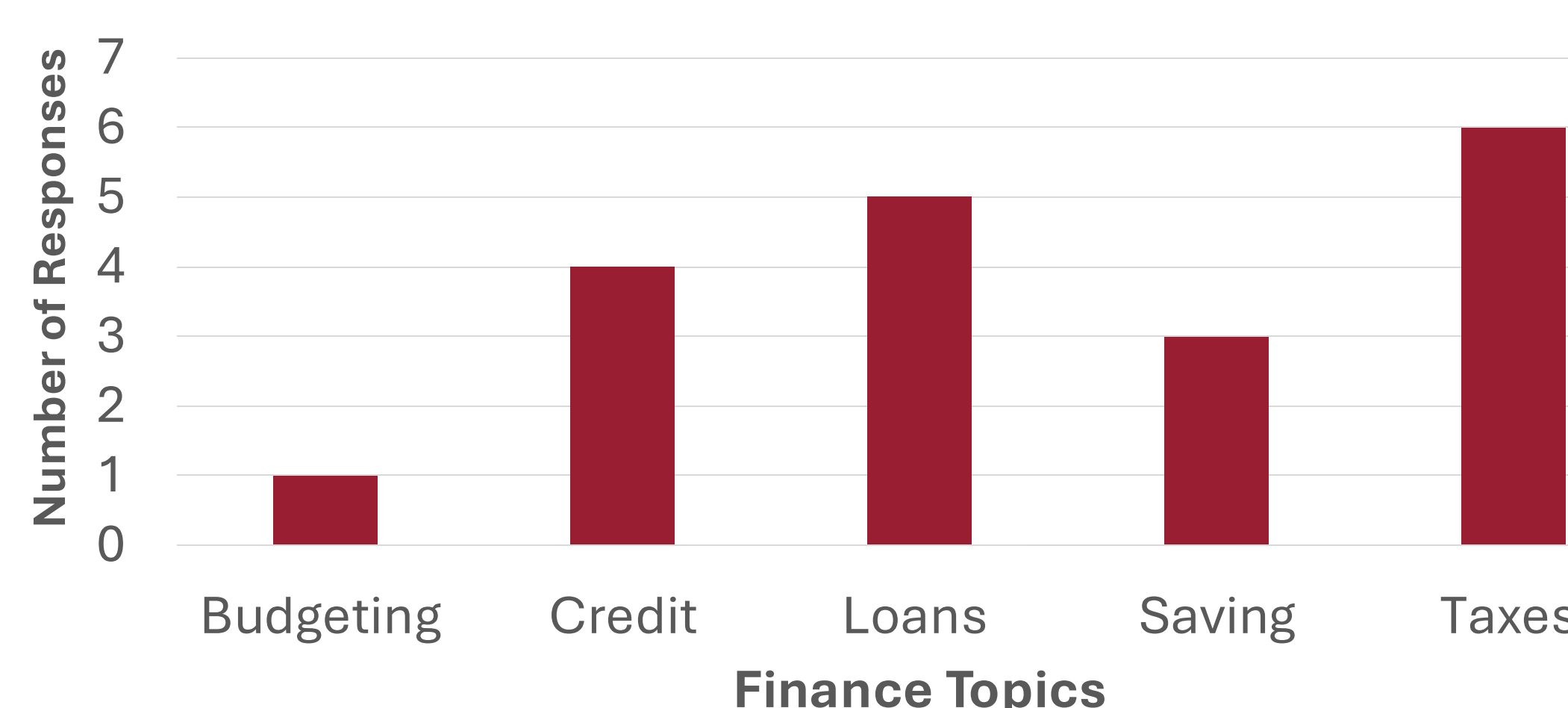


Figure 6: Student Perceptions on the Cougar Food Pantry as an Emergency Resource

Have you used the Cougar Food Pantry

Yes	No
9	12

Have you used Emergency Resources

Yes	No
1	20



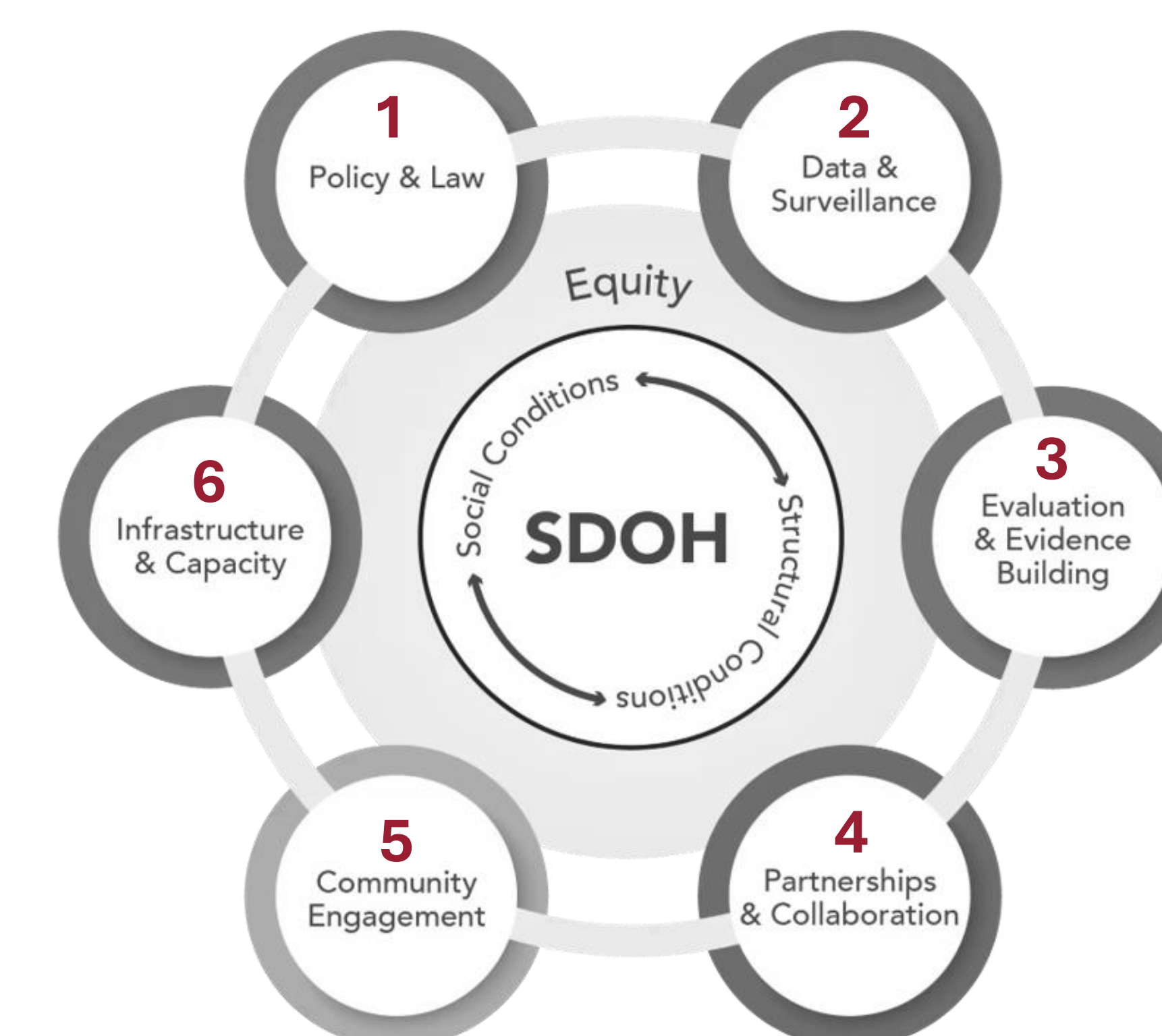
DISCUSSION

In all, finances, time, motivation, accessibility, transportation, and a lack of community around food are inducers of this social condition. However, addressing students needs proactively does not require skill centric approaches, but instead changing the sociocultural context they live in. Students also do not see the Cougar Food Pantry as an emergency resource. Last, students in the Southeastern region of Washington are less likely to skip a meal compared to students in the rest of the state, but those that do, are doing so for longer comparatively. Altogether, student experiences must be the foundation from which interventions are designed.



IMPLICATIONS/FUTURE WORK

Figure 9: CDC’s 6 Pillars for Addressing the Social Determinates of Health



1. Policy & Law: Advocate for programs that address key areas of the student experience with food.

2/3. Data, Surveillance, Evaluation, and Evidence Building: Continue data collection and explore news way to define this problem.

4/5. Partnerships, Collaboration, and Community Engagement : Work to partner with on and off campus organizations and build awareness by increasing student, faculty, and staff engagement with events and topics of food insecurity.

6. Infrastructure & Capacity: Build capacity and budget to move away from treatment-based interventions.

CDC. (2024, February 27). *Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)* at CDC. About CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/about/priorities/social-determinants-of-health-at-cdc.html>

Washington Student Achievement Council. (2023) *Basic Needs Security Among Washington College Students*. <https://wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2023.BasicNeedsReport>