



STILL HUNGRY AND HOMELESS IN COLLEGE

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Each participating institution offered a window into the lives of their students. We thank the institutional researchers and administrators whose willingness to be a part of this project has contributed to increased understanding of the lived experience of today's students.

Finally, we would like to thank the students across the country whose responses to this survey have given voice to the needs and experiences of college students everywhere.

The Bottom Line:

This is the largest national survey assessing the basic needs security of university students. It is the HOPE Lab's 3rd national survey; the other two focused on community colleges. This year we report on 43,000 students at 66 institutions in 20 states and the District of Columbia. That includes over 20,000 students at 35 4-year colleges and universities, as well as students at community colleges.¹

We find:

- 36% of university students were food insecure in the 30 days preceding the survey. This year's estimate for community college students is 42%, but our larger study last year found 56%.²
- 36% of university students were housing insecure in the last year. Housing insecurity affected 51% of community college students in last year's study, and 46% in this year's study.
- 9% of university students were homeless in the last year. In comparison, 12% of community college students were homeless in this year's survey, and 14% in last year's survey.

The data show that basic needs insecurities disproportionately affect marginalized students and are associated with long work hours and higher risk of unemployment. However, the level of academic effort – in and outside the classroom—is the same regardless of whether or not students are dealing with food and housing insecurity. It is therefore critically important to match their commitments with supports to ensure degree completion.

If your institution is interested in participating in a 2018 survey of basic needs, please contact Christine Baker-Smith at christine.baker-smith@temple.edu or (215) 204-1822.

Basic Needs Insecurity in Higher Education: A Continuing Challenge

Since 2008, the Wisconsin HOPE Lab has examined food and housing insecurity among the nation's undergraduates. We initially focused on Wisconsin, assessing prevalence of basic needs challenges in two samples of students—a cohort of Pell Grant recipients entering the state's 42 public colleges and universities in fall 2008, and a cohort of low- and moderate-income students entering 10 public and private colleges and universities in 2012.³ Then we expanded to consider these challenges at colleges around the nation. Since there is no nationally representative survey of undergraduates that measures food or housing insecurity, surveying samples of students at colleges is the only option.⁴

This has been a major challenge.⁵ Limited finances and legal restrictions make it difficult to collect data from multiple colleges while obtaining high response rates. We would prefer to offer students strong monetary incentives and draw representative subsamples of students to focus the surveys on, but lack both the money and the data required. Therefore, we field inexpensive e-surveys and send them to each college's entire population of undergraduates. The low response rates (often south of 10%) trouble us, but the estimates are likely conservative—our surveys do not explicitly recruit hungry or homeless students, and we expect that they have far less time or energy to give up for surveys. However, we leave that assessment to our readers—simply publishing the results as they arrive with as much transparency as possible, and continuing year after year to provide each college and university with its own data. We also continue to call on the National Center for Education Statistics to assess basic needs security on their nationally representative studies of undergraduates, and ask that other surveys of students include these questions as well.⁶

This report is about our third national survey. In 2015 we worked with the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) and invited all 1,200 of their members to do the survey. In total, 10 community colleges in 7 states accepted, and just over 4,000 students completed the questions. In 2016, we again partnered with ACCT, and 70 of their members responded, coming from 24 states, with a few repeats from 2015. More than 33,000 students completed that survey. In 2017, we opened the invitation up to any college or university, 2-year or 4-year, public or private, offering to support their efforts to address students' basic needs by collecting data to inform their practices. This year's survey is a purely voluntary, non-random sample, and includes 66 colleges and universities, including 31 community colleges and 35 4-year colleges and universities from 20 states and Washington, D.C. In total, 43,000 students responded, including over 20,000 in the 4-year sector. This is, therefore, the largest national assessment of basic needs security among 4-year students.

Food insecurity is the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or the ability to acquire such foods in a socially acceptable manner.⁷ The most extreme form is often accompanied with physiological sensations of hunger.

Homelessness means that a person is without a place to live, often residing in a shelter, an automobile, an abandoned building or outside, while **housing insecurity** includes a broader set of challenges such as the inability to pay rent or utilities or the need to move frequently. All of these challenges affect students, and the results this year suggest that it is more common to endure them during college than to have all of one's needs met.

What We Know About Basic Needs Insecurity Among College Students

Studies of basic needs insecurity among college students, once rare, have become increasingly common as public awareness of the problem has grown. The HOPE Lab compiles an [annotated list of these studies](#) and adds to it each month. Prior to 2011, only two studies that we are aware of measured food or housing insecurity among U.S. postsecondary populations.⁸ Since that time, more than 20 studies have been released.⁹ Given the number of studies, the many different types of institutions, locations, and study designs, estimates of food and housing insecurity range widely for both community colleges and 4-year colleges. Across the range of estimates and surveyed institutions, however, by and large available research indicates that basic needs insecurity among college students constitutes a significant public health issue that undermines college graduation rates.

Most studies of basic needs at 4-year colleges and universities focus on single institutions, with some exceptions. Public institutions in California have led the way on assessing needs insecurity. Surveys of students in the University of California (UC) System, led by the UC Nutrition Policy Institute, found that 42% of surveyed students were food insecure.¹⁰ A recent study by the California State University (CSU) System estimates that 42% of CSU respondents faced food insecurity and another 11% experienced homelessness at least once in the past year.¹¹ A survey fielded by the College and University Food Bank Alliance, National Campaign Against Student Hunger and Homelessness, Student Government Resource Center, and Student Public Interest Research Group found even higher levels of basic needs insecurity.¹² Researchers at the City University of New York (CUNY) estimated that 39% of CUNY students were food insecure and 42% experienced housing instability.¹³ Among single-institution studies, estimates of food and housing insecurity range widely across 4-year institutions. In general, large or flagship universities are at the low end of that range, as are estimates that focus on first-year students.¹⁴ Similar estimates at rural or regional 4-years are typically higher.¹⁵

Surveys of community college students typically yield higher estimates of basic needs insecurity.¹⁶ A 2015 Wisconsin HOPE Lab survey of 4,000 students at 10 community colleges found that 39% of respondents reported low or very low food security, and 52% reported housing insecurity, including 13% who had experienced homelessness.¹⁷ A 2016 HOPE Lab survey of 33,000 students at 70 community colleges found that 56% of students experienced low or very low food insecurity, 51% were housing insecure, and 14% were homeless.¹⁸

Basic needs insecurities are associated with poor academic outcomes. For example, several researchers have found that food insecurity is correlated with lower grades in college.¹⁹ Broton (2017) finds that housing insecurity has a strong, statistically significant relationship with completion, persistence and credit attainment.²⁰ Other researchers have found associations between basic needs insecurity and poorer self-reported physical health, symptoms of depression, and higher perceived stress.²¹ Despite this emerging evidence, more information is needed regarding potential causal connections between basic needs insecurity and college students' academic, health, and other outcomes. Although this evidence exists in the K-12 literature, precise causal relationships are unknown for postsecondary students.²² Researchers with the HOPE Lab are now conducting three randomized trials to test whether interventions aimed at alleviating food and/or housing insecurity boost college graduation rates among community college students.²³

Use of public assistance among college students is relatively uncommon, even when students are experiencing food and housing insecurity.²⁴ Bianco and colleagues (2016) find that only 20% of students eligible for CalFresh, California's SNAP program, actually receive benefits.²⁵ Although there are many reasons that students do not take advantage of available assistance, one reason is that social stigma prevents some students from receiving the help they need. For example, a survey at a large, Midwestern public university found that 50% of respondents reported that they did not want to be served by their peers at a campus food pantry.²⁶ These findings echo a growing qualitative literature revealing that stigma surrounding basic needs insecurity, and homelessness in particular, is a significant challenge that institutions and social services must overcome in order to reach college students.²⁷

Better understanding how students experience and cope with basic needs security is essential for designing effective interventions and policies. As awareness of students' food and housing struggles has increased, both institutions and policymakers have begun to respond. As one example of the growing response, the College and University Food Bank Alliance (CUFBA), an organization that supports the development of campus food banks and pantries, has grown from 12 members in 2012 to 591 members as of February 2018.²⁸ Researchers have begun to document some of these supports, including case studies of specific programs and comparisons of varying responses across institutions.²⁹ To ensure that students are receiving the help they need, researchers now must focus on rigorously evaluating existing interventions. Examples of such evaluations are beginning to emerge, but many more are needed.³⁰

Methodology

Following on *Hungry and Homeless in College*, we heard from many colleges and universities who wanted to assess the security of their students' basic needs. In response, we extended the opportunity to participate in our 2017 (at no charge) to any institution who wished to participate, irrespective of institutional type or sector. The primary purpose was to enable college communities to have the data needed to stimulate action in order to support students.

Participating institutions agreed to administer an online survey in the fall and offer ten \$100 prizes to their students in order to boost response rates. They sent a series of invitations and reminders to students to encourage them to participate. Obtaining the necessary data to create an institutionally- or nationally-representative sample was not possible, so participating colleges sent emails to all enrolled undergraduates in order to capture the experiences of the entire student body.³¹ Given these constraints, the results may not be generalizable on either the institutional or national levels. However, the results are broadly similar to previous results, including those in both previous HOPE Lab reports (see Appendix A for a discussion of differences in basic needs security measurement across the three HOPE Lab surveys and aggregate measures combining the three samples). We continue to call on both government and private philanthropy to provide the funding necessary to field more rigorous future surveys.³²

Survey measures of basic needs insecurity were similar to previous years (for a comparison of survey items across the Wisconsin HOPE Lab's 2015, 2016, and 2017 surveys, see Appendix A.) The United States Department of Agriculture's 10-item Adult Food Security Survey Module was used to assess food insecurity (this is a change from prior surveys, when we used the 6-item).³³ Housing insecurity was measured with six items that asked students about difficulties paying housing costs or maintaining stable housing. Students who answered affirmatively to any of the six questions for each time period were classified as housing insecure. Similarly, students were considered homeless if they answered

affirmatively to any of five questions focusing on lack of housing, including whether students have stayed in a shelter, slept in a place not meant as housing, or did not know where they would sleep.

The survey sample includes 43,000 students from 66 institutions (see Appendix B for a full list of participating institutions). Institutions sent survey invitations to nearly 600,000 students. The response rate was 7.3%. These rates are lower than the HOPE Lab's 2015 survey (9%) but higher than the 2016 survey (4.5%), and similar to the CSU's Basic Needs Initiative survey fielded in 2016.³⁴ Institutions typically fielded the survey early in fall term, as students enduring basic needs insecurity are at greater risk for dropout.³⁵ However, approximately 20 institutions fielded later in the semester and a few fielded in January at the beginning of spring semester.

Table 1 describes characteristics of the 31 community colleges and 35 4-year institutions (see Appendix B for a list of participants). The participants come almost entirely from the public sector; despite extensive recruiting of both for-profit and nonprofit institutions, just five nonprofit private 4-year colleges participated. Although institutions from across the country participated, the Northeast and South census regions contained the most participants due to concerted efforts by state systems in Massachusetts and Georgia, and the institutions are mainly located in cities or surrounding suburbs. The undergraduate populations of participating institutions ranged from under 1,000 to over 30,000. The 4-year colleges were slightly larger on average due to the inclusion of several large public universities.

Table 1. Characteristics of 66 Participating Institutions

	Community Colleges	4-year Colleges
N	31	35
Private	0%	14%
Census Region		
West	19%	0%
Midwest	10%	23%
South	6%	40%
Northeast	65%	40%
Urbanization		
City	45%	46%
Suburb	39%	31%
Town	6%	20%
Rural	10%	3%
Undergraduate Population		
Under 5,000	27%	29%
5,000-9,999	37%	34%
10,000-19,999	30%	23%
20,000 or more	7%	14%

Sources and Notes:

Census region derived from the U.S. Census Bureau. (2018). Census regions and divisions of the United States. Retrieved from https://www2.census.gov/geo/pdfs/maps-data/maps/reference/us_regdiv.pdf

Urbanization and institution size are sourced from National Center for Education Statistics. (2018). Integrated Postsecondary Education data System. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/>

Table 2 describes students in the sample. Women were overrepresented, accounting for 71% of community college students and 70% of 4-year students.³⁶ Slightly more than half of respondents identified as non-Hispanic white. The community college sample contains a smaller percentage of black students (11% versus 17% at 4-years) and a larger percentage of Hispanic students (14% compared to 6% at 4-years). Similar to national trends, respondents at community colleges were older: 40% of community college students were over age 25, compared to just 16% of 4-year students. Consistent with the age profiles, students at community colleges were also more likely to be married (19%) than their 4-year counterparts (8%). Students at community colleges (37%) were less likely than students at 4-year institutions (57%) to have at least one parent with a bachelor's or greater. Students at community colleges (69%) were considerably more likely than those at 4-year institutions (41%) to be independent from their parents for financial aid purposes and to have children of their own (27% versus 12%). Likewise, community college students were more likely to have experienced foster care (4% versus 1%). Across institution types, 96% of students were citizens or permanent residents.

Seventy-one percent of community college students and 53% of 4-year students were in their first two years of college. The percentage of students receiving the Pell Grant was balanced across institution types (45% and 44%). Students at community colleges were less likely to attend full time (57% versus 87%) and more likely to work (67% versus 59%).

Table 2. Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Group	Institution Type	
	2-Year	4-Year
Gender		
Male	26%	27%
Female	71%	70%
Non-binary	3%	3%
Race/Ethnicity		
White, Non-Hispanic	53%	54%
Black	11%	17%
Hispanic	14%	6%
Asian	5%	9%
Middle-Eastern/Arab/North African	1%	1%
Native American	0%	0%
More than one race/Other	15%	13%
Age		
18 to 20	35%	48%
21 to 25	25%	37%
26 to 30	14%	7%
Over 30	26%	9%
Highest Level of Parental Education		
No diploma	9%	5%
High school	25%	14%
Some college	29%	23%
Bachelor's degree or greater	37%	57%

Table 2. Characteristics of Survey Respondents (cont.)

Group	Institution Type	
	2-Year	4-Year
Student Is Claimed by Parent as Dependent		
Yes	31%	59%
No	69%	41%
Student in Foster Care		
Yes	4%	1%
No	96%	99%
Student Has Children		
Yes	27%	12%
No	73%	88%
Citizenship Status		
Citizen or permanent resident	96%	96%
Not a citizen or permanent resident	4%	4%
Parent Citizenship Status		
Both parents are citizens or permanent residents	96%	96%
At least 1 parent is not a citizen or permanent resident	4%	4%
Relationship Status		
Single	47%	56%
In a relationship	31%	34%
Married	19%	8%
Divorced	3%	1%
Widowed	0.6%	0.1%
Years in College		
Less than 1	33%	23%
1 to 2	38%	30%
More than 2	29%	48%
Student Receives the Pell Grant		
Yes	45%	44%
No	55%	56%
Student Status		
Full-time	57%	87%
Part-time	43%	13%
Employment		
Employed	67%	59%
Looking	15%	20%
Not looking	18%	22%

Prevalence of Food and Housing Insecurity

During the 30 days preceding the survey, 42% of community college students indicated that they were at the lowest or very lowest levels of food security. Moreover, 36% of university students were at those levels (Figure 1).³⁷ Almost one-third of community college students and one-quarter of university students said that because of a lack of money they skipped meals or cut the size of their meals, with 22% of community college students and 18% of university students doing this at least 3 days in the last 30 days (Figure 2). Nine percent of community college students and 6% of university students said they had gone at least one whole day during the last month without eating because they lacked money.

Figure 1. Food Security Among Sample Respondents

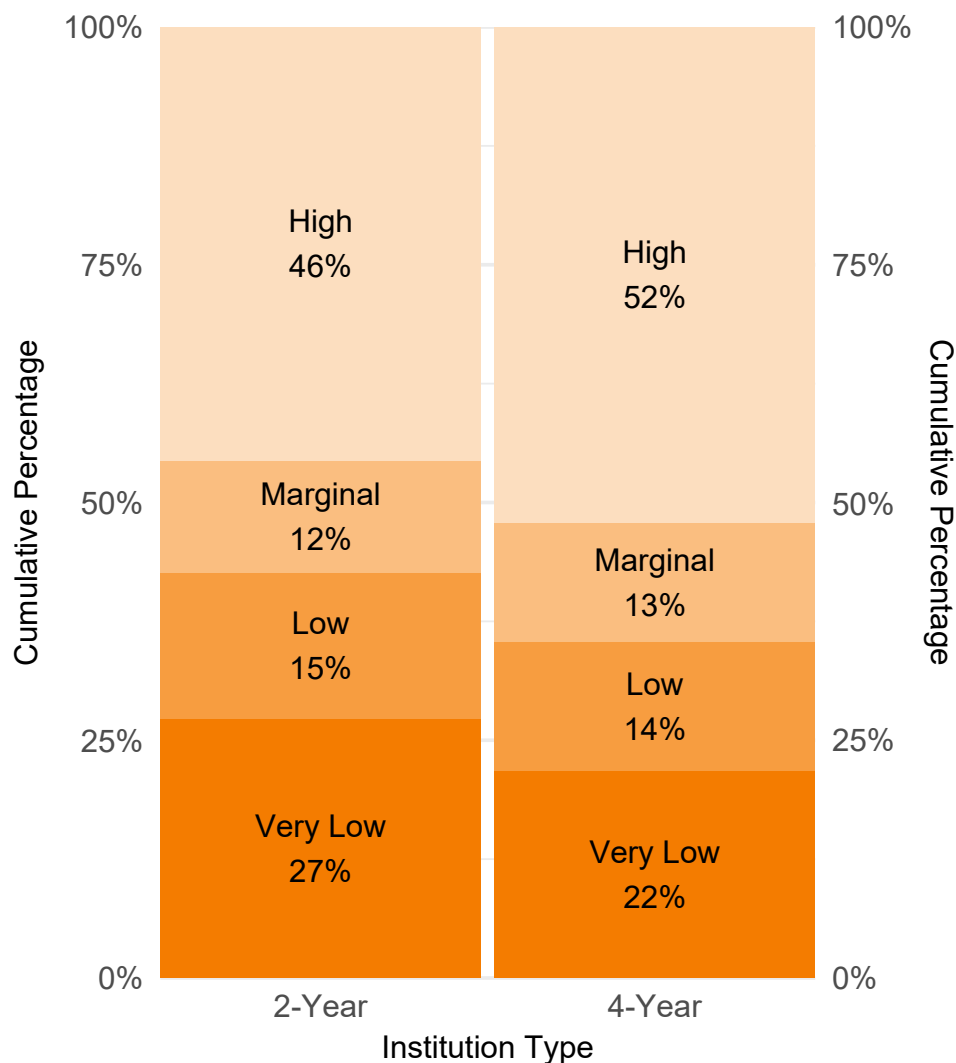
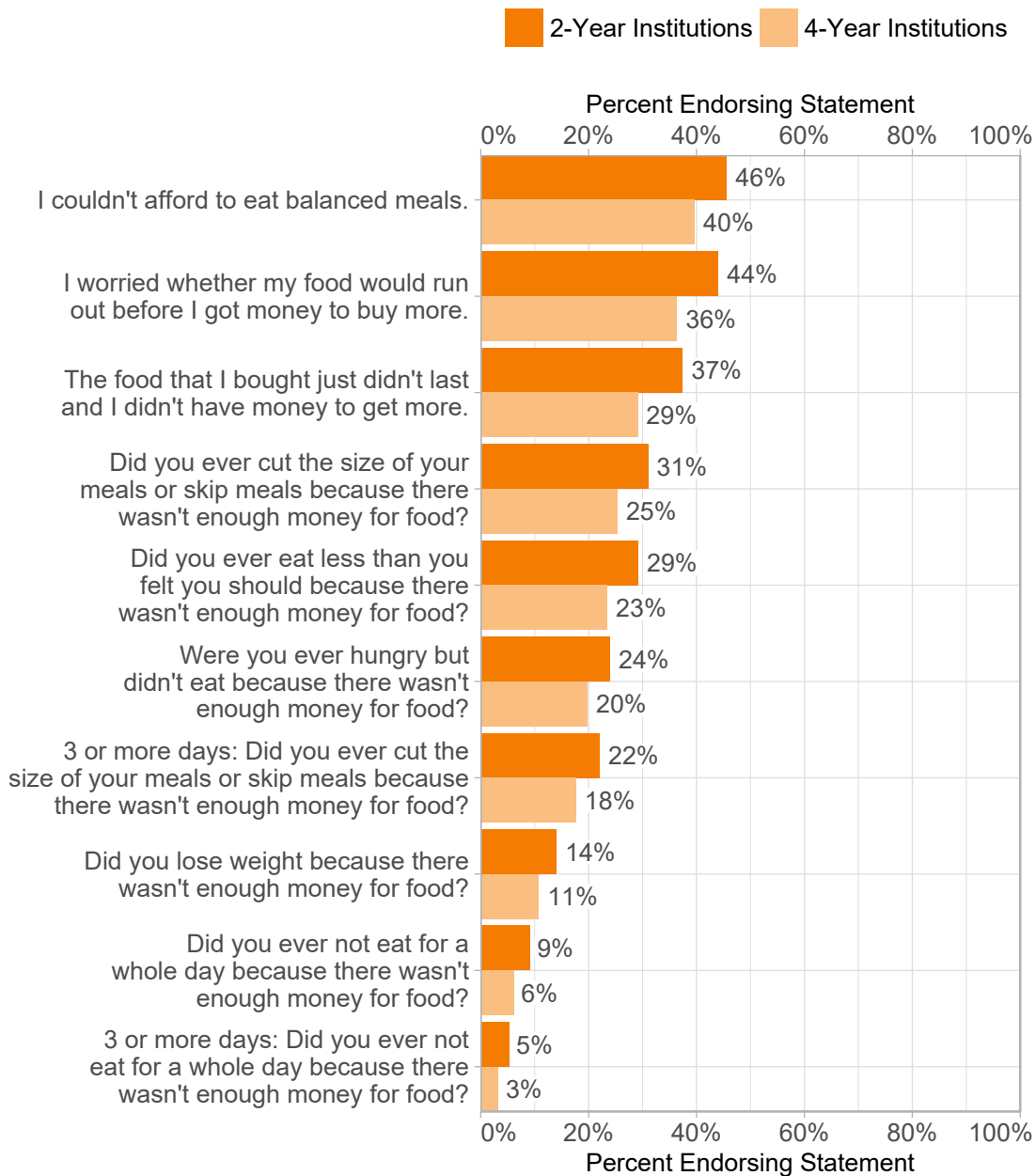


Figure 2. Food Insecurity Items



There was quite a bit of variation among community colleges and universities when it comes to food insecurity, however. Estimates at community colleges ranged from 30 to 60%, though the colleges with larger survey samples clustered near the mean of 43% (Figure 3). The variation was even more pronounced at the universities, with estimates ranging from 15 to over 60%, but most between 30 and 40%.

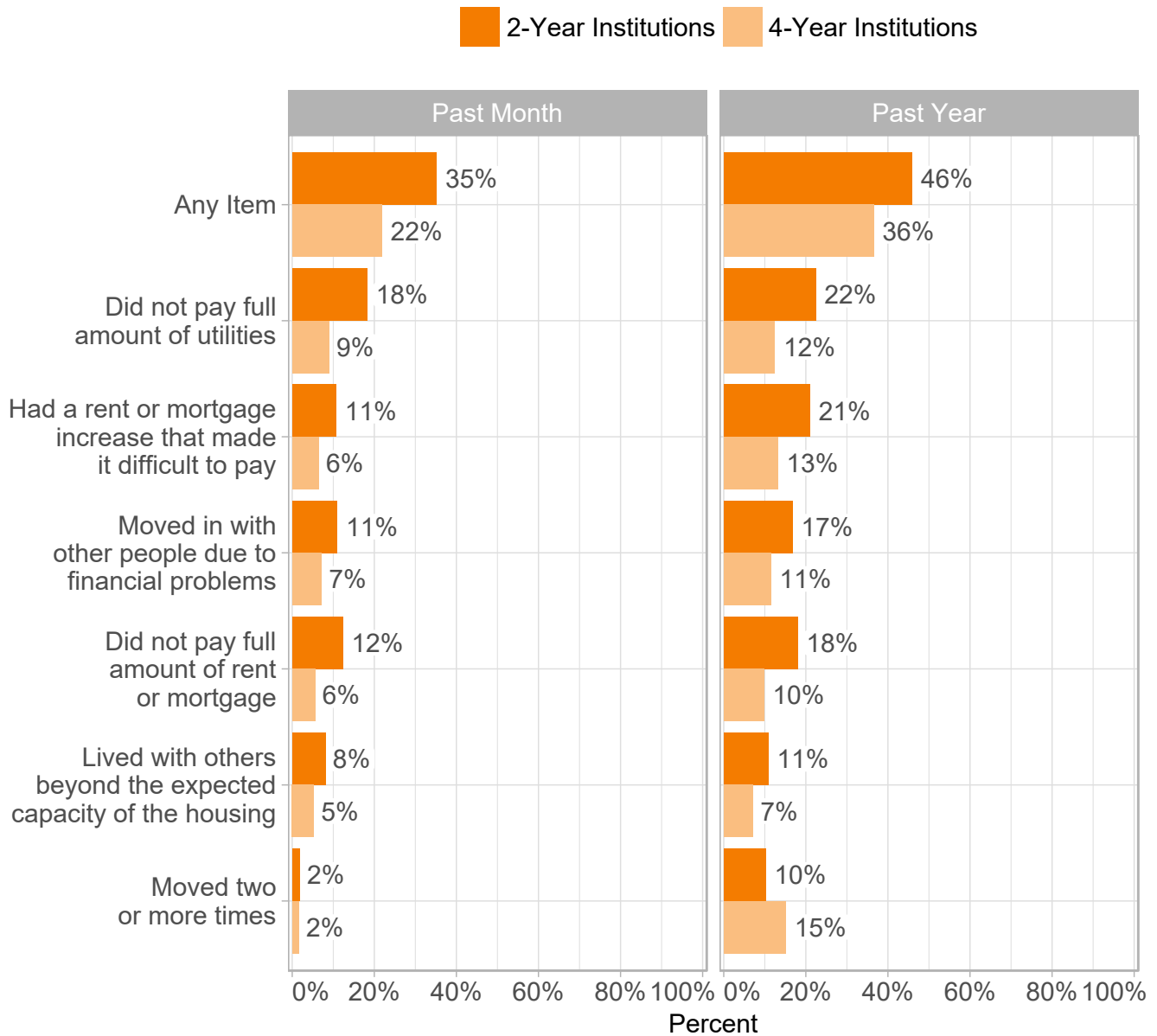
Figure 3. Variability of Basic Needs Insecurity Across Sample Institutions



We asked students to report on the security of their housing, including homelessness, during the 30 days preceding the survey and also over the last year (Figure 4). We did this in response to qualitative evidence that students endure spells of housing instability, and to test the common hypothesis that students' housing challenges occur during breaks rather than during the academic year.

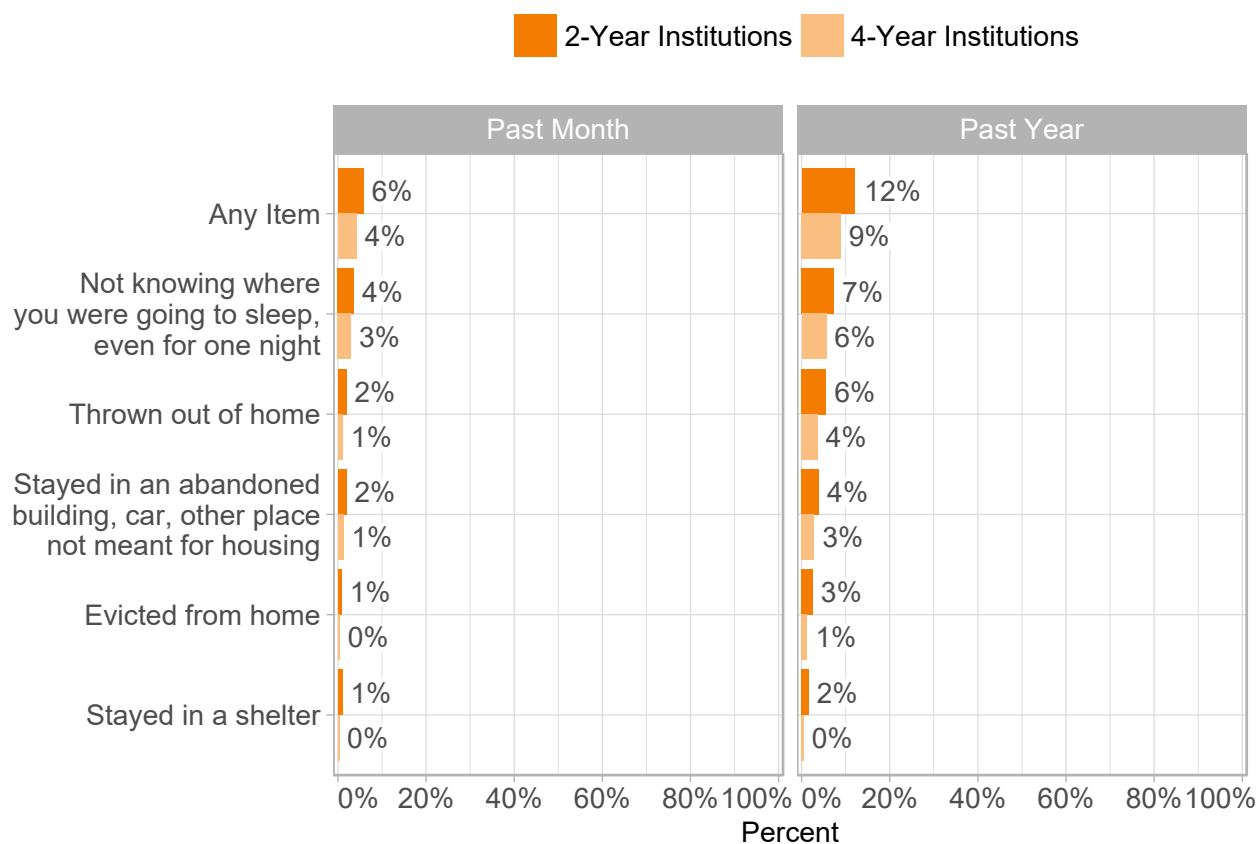
Almost half (46%) of community college students experienced housing insecurity in the last year, and 35% experienced it in the last 30 days. The most common challenges, experienced by about one-fifth of those students in the past year, were difficulty paying rent or under-paying the amount owed on utilities. Housing insecurity also affected 36% of university students over the last year, and 22% over the last 30 days. They, too, primarily struggled to pay utilities. The institutional variation in housing insecurity was very similar to that for food insecurity (see Figure 3).

Figure 4. Housing Insecurity Among Sample Respondents



Homelessness affected 12% of community college students and 9% of university students over the last year (Figure 5). Incidence over the last 30 days was approximately half of that over the last year. The most common challenge noted was “not knowing where you were going to sleep, even for one night.” Six percent of community college students and 4% of university students had been thrown out of their homes, and 4% of community college students and 3% of university students said that they slept in an abandoned building, car, or other place not meant for housing. Very few students at either community colleges or universities stayed in a shelter.

Figure 5. Homelessness Among Sample Respondents

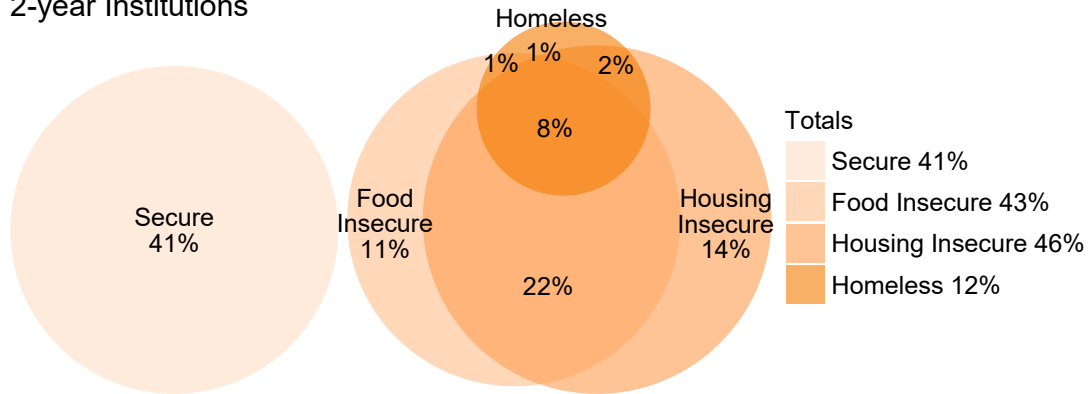


There was less institutional variation in rates of homelessness, compared to food or housing insecurity (see Figure 3). Estimates ranged from about 5% to 15% for both community college and university students, but most clustered at just over 10% for community colleges and just under 10% for universities.

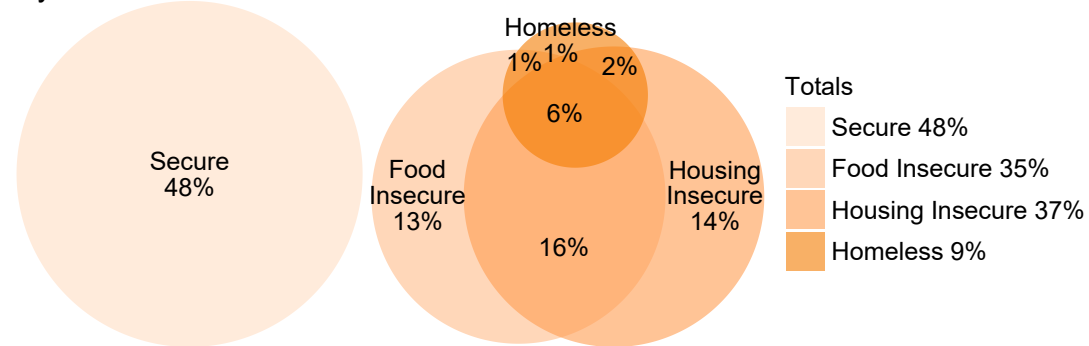
Most remarkably, just 41% of community college students and 48% of university students were completely secure, never experiencing food or housing insecurity or homelessness during the past year.

Figure 6. Intersections of Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity, and Homelessness

2-year Institutions



4-year Institutions



Experiences of food and housing insecurity and homelessness may intersect for a given student. During a year, they may go through different spells of trouble with housing, for example, and at some points may experience more than one challenge. Among community college students, we found that 22% were both food and housing insecure during the last year, and 8% experienced both of those challenges as well as homelessness (Figure 6). Those rates, at 16% and 6%, were only somewhat lower for university students. Most remarkably, just 41% of community college students and 48% of university students were completely secure, never experiencing food or housing insecurity or homelessness during the past year.

Disparities

Some students are at greater risk of basic needs insecurity than others. The students in this survey at greatest risk of basic needs insecurity were former foster youth. There were 686 former foster youth in college who completed this survey and more than 60% of them were food insecure and housing insecure, and almost 1 in 4 had experienced homelessness in the last year (Table 3). While in many other cases we observed lower rates of basic needs insecurity at universities compared to community colleges, this was not true for former foster youth—they evidenced similar risk of these challenges in both types of institutions.

Table 3. Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurity Among Survey Respondents

		Basic Needs Insecurity			
	Institution	n	Food	Housing	Homelessness
Student Ever in Foster Care					
Yes	2-Year	403	62%	68%	24%
	4-Year	283	63%	60%	24%
No	2-Year	10,006	42%	46%	12%
	4-Year	19,877	35%	37%	9%
Gender					
Male	2-Year	2,698	36%	38%	11%
	4-Year	5,548	28%	31%	9%
Female	2-Year	7,484	44%	49%	12%
	4-Year	14,079	37%	39%	8%
Non-binary	2-Year	293	50%	52%	23%
	4-Year	588	46%	50%	18%
Sexual Orientation					
Heterosexual	2-Year	8,419	41%	46%	11%
	4-Year	16,313	33%	35%	7%
Homosexual	2-Year	390	47%	48%	18%
	4-Year	787	43%	44%	16%
Bisexual	2-Year	1,012	54%	55%	23%
	4-Year	2,045	47%	47%	16%
None	2-Year	506	42%	42%	12%
	4-Year	937	42%	38%	12%

Table 3. Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurity Among Survey Respondents (Cont.)

Institution	Basic Needs Insecurity				
	n	Food	Housing	Homelessness	
Race/Ethnicity					
Black	2-Year	1,122	54%	55%	13%
	4-Year	3,377	47%	43%	9%
Native American	2-Year	42	55%	69%	19%
	4-Year	34	30%	58%	15%
Hispanic	2-Year	1,465	47%	51%	10%
	4-Year	1,201	42%	39%	8%
Middle-Eastern/ Arab	2-Year	59	43%	49%	12%
	4-Year	256	33%	30%	6%
Asian	2-Year	571	36%	37%	7%
	4-Year	1,753	27%	26%	6%
White	2-Year	5,564	37%	42%	11%
	4-Year	10,962	30%	35%	8%
Mixed/Other	2-Year	1,594	50%	52%	17%
	4-Year	2,558	42%	42%	14%
Student Receives the Pell Grant					
Yes	2-Year	5,191	55%	57%	15%
	4-Year	10,229	46%	45%	11%
No	2-Year	6,425	35%	38%	10%
	4-Year	13,157	28%	31%	7%
Student Citizenship Status					
Citizen or permanent resident	2-Year	7,048	42%	45%	12%
	4-Year	17,098	36%	38%	9%
Not a citizen or permanent resident	2-Year	265	38%	44%	8%
	4-Year	655	29%	39%	6%
Parent Citizenship Status					
Both parents are citizens or permanent residents	2-Year	6,779	42%	45%	12%
	4-Year	16,780	35%	37%	9%
At least 1 parent is not a citizen or permanent resident	2-Year	528	41%	47%	8%
	4-Year	969	34%	41%	7%

Table 3. Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurity Among Survey Respondents (Cont.)

		Basic Needs Insecurity			
Institution		n	Food	Housing	Homelessness
Highest Level of Parental Education					
No diploma	2-Year	903	47%	51%	9%
	4-Year	1,055	47%	43%	13%
High school	2-Year	2,598	47%	52%	13%
	4-Year	2,905	43%	41%	9%
Some college	2-Year	3,062	46%	49%	14%
	4-Year	4,692	41%	40%	10%
Bachelor's degree or greater	2-Year	3,861	35%	39%	11%
	4-Year	11,483	30%	34%	8%
Military Service					
Yes	2-Year	516	40%	50%	14%
	4-Year	624	33%	45%	11%
No	2-Year	9,842	43%	46%	12%
	4-Year	19,441	35%	37%	9%
Student Status					
Full-time	2-Year	7,489	44%	45%	13%
	4-Year	22,364	35%	35%	9%
Part-time	2-Year	5,564	41%	48%	11%
	4-Year	3,423	41%	46%	9%
Student Is Claimed by Parent as Dependent					
Yes	2-Year	3,233	35%	33%	12%
	4-Year	11,772	32%	33%	8%
No	2-Year	7,060	46%	53%	12%
	4-Year	8,207	39%	44%	10%
Age					
18 to 20	2-Year	3,645	33%	30%	12%
	4-Year	9,477	28%	27%	8%
21 to 25	2-Year	2,565	48%	49%	14%
	4-Year	7,429	40%	43%	10%
26 to 30	2-Year	1,480	51%	61%	13%
	4-Year	1,373	46%	56%	11%
Over 30	2-Year	2,663	46%	57%	10%
	4-Year	1,752	42%	53%	8%
Student Has Children					
Yes	2-Year	2,766	52%	61%	11%
	4-Year	2,339	43%	51%	10%
No	2-Year	7,616	39%	41%	12%
	4-Year	17,746	34%	35%	9%

Table 3. Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurity Among Survey Respondents (Cont.)

	Institution	Basic Needs Insecurity			
		n	Food	Housing	Homelessness
Relationship Status					
Single	2-Year	4,859	41%	42%	13%
	4-Year	11,330	33%	33%	9%
In a relationship	2-Year	3,218	45%	48%	15%
	4-Year	6,912	38%	40%	10%
Married	2-Year	1,920	38%	50%	6%
	4-Year	1,599	34%	45%	6%
Divorced	2-Year	319	58%	67%	14%
	4-Year	219	50%	66%	14%
Widowed	2-Year	60	42%	58%	7%
	4-Year	29	57%	59%	7%
Housing Location					
On-campus	2-Year	40	49%	38%	16%
	4-Year	6,293	26%	25%	8%
Off-campus	2-Year	10,839	42%	46%	12%
	4-Year	14,612	39%	42%	9%
Meal Plan					
Yes	2-Year	360	40%	42%	13%
	4-Year	6,829	26%	25%	8%
No	2-Year	10,549	42%	46%	12%
	4-Year	14,172	39%	42%	9%

In this survey we collected additional data on vulnerabilities to examine a more complete portrait of the intersectionality between gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and basic needs than we have in prior report. In the past, for example, we compared male and female students only, but this time we also examined prevalence among non-binary students. The results are stark: consistent with prior work, we found females at greater risk of food insecurity than males, but non-binary students were at even greater risk. For example, among university students, 28% of male students were food insecure, compared to 37% of female students and 46% of non-binary students. A similar pattern held for housing insecurity. But when it came to homelessness, male and female students were at similar risk; however, non-binary students were at far greater risk—23% of non-binary students at community colleges and 18% of non-binary students at universities reported experiencing homelessness in the last year (compared to 11% and 9% of their male peers, respectively).

Similarly, we found that homosexual students were at much greater risk of basic needs insecurity than heterosexual students, but that bisexual students were at the highest risk. Almost half of the more than 2,000 bisexual students at universities experienced food and/or housing insecurity, compared to about one-third of their heterosexual peers. More than one in five bisexual community college students and 18% of homosexual community college students experienced homelessness, compared to 11% of

their heterosexual peers. It is likely that these disproportionalities are linked to the higher risk of family estrangement and consequently lower levels of family financial support among LGBTQ students.³⁸

Consistent with our prior surveys and those conducted by other researchers, there were evident disparities in basic needs insecurities by race/ethnicity. At both community colleges and universities, black students were 17 percentage points more likely than non-Hispanic white students to experience food insecurity (54 vs. 37% at community colleges, 47% vs. 30% at universities), and were also at greater risk of housing insecurity and homelessness. Homelessness was especially pronounced among Native American students (19% at community colleges and 15% at universities), and students who identified their race/ethnicity as “mixed/other” (17% at community colleges and 14% at universities). On the other hand, Asian students were at much lower risk of housing challenges when compared to white students, though even their incidence of these challenges was non-negligible at between 6-7%.

In contrast to our prior surveys, the results this year identified large differences in rates of basic needs insecurity based on whether or not the student reported receiving the federal Pell Grant. More than 15,000 students in this survey received that grant, which was originally intended to fully cover the costs of attending college. Fifty-five percent of Pell recipients at community colleges and 46% of Pell recipients at universities exhibited food insecurity in this survey, with similar rates for housing insecurity, and 15% of Pell recipients at community colleges were homeless in the last year, as were 11% of Pell recipients at universities. There was a 14-20 percentage point gap in food and housing insecurity and a 4-5 percentage point gap in homelessness compared to non-Pell recipients.

Students who are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents or whose parents are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents often have less access to financial resources during college. Survey data, however, did not show greater basic needs insecurities for these students. In fact, students who were neither citizens nor permanent residents were less likely to experience food insecurity (38% versus 42% at community colleges and 29% versus 36% at 4-year colleges). Rates of homelessness reflected similar patterns, although rates of housing insecurity were roughly equal within 2-year and 4-year institution types. For students whose parents were not citizens or permanent residents, rates of food insecurity were relatively similar to other students'. However, students whose parents were not citizens were at higher risk of housing insecurity yet lower risk of homelessness. In other words, being a U.S. citizen or having parents who are citizens did not appear to be much of a buffer against basic needs insecurity. Parental education was a more effective protection—food and housing insecurity was less common among students whose parents had higher levels of education. Even so, it is surprising that an estimated 8% of university students and 11% of community college students who had at least one parent with a bachelor's degree nonetheless experienced homelessness during the last year.

There are several other unexpected patterns to students' responses:

- Student-veterans were at slightly lower risk of food insecurity compared to non-veterans, but at greater risk of housing insecurity and homelessness. These differences were most pronounced at universities, where 45% of student-veterans reported housing insecurity and 11% reported homelessness, compared to 37% and 9% of non-veterans respectively. There are several potential reasons for these patterns. Delays in the distribution of payments from the G.I. Bill can make it especially difficult to cover the upfront costs at universities.³⁹ Food pantries are common in veterans' centers while housing services are less common.

- At community colleges, full-time students exhibited higher rates of food insecurity compared to part-time students, while at universities part-time students faced those struggles more often. One potential cause is the work requirement associated with SNAP; students must work at least 20 hours a week unless they meet one of several exemption criteria.⁴⁰ Students at community colleges may have more difficulty securing or managing full-time attendance at school on top of work, and/or the full-time students at community college may be less likely than the part-time students to be in technical programs that meet the exemption criteria. It may also be the case that community college students are disproportionately likely to live in public housing prior to college, and that rules de-prioritizing full-time students destabilize their housing.
- Students who were independent for financial aid purposes were at higher risk of food insecurity compared to dependent students, and older students were at higher risk, too. Between 42-51% of students who were at least 26 years old in this survey were food insecure, compared to 28-33% of 18-20 year olds. This pattern also held for housing insecurity. However, there was much less disparity in the prevalence of homelessness—the rate was similar for independent and dependent students and for students between 18-30 years old; the odds of experiencing homelessness during college did not decline much until after age 30.
- We see similar patterns based on family status. Student-parents appeared at much higher risk of food and housing insecurity than students without children. For example, more than half of student-parents in this survey experienced housing insecurity, regardless of the type of college they attended, compared to 35-41% of students without children. But again, rates of homelessness varied far less; students with and without children appeared to be at equivalent risk, and the only relationship status that appeared protective against homelessness in college was marriage.

College administrators often suggest that living on campus and having a meal plan will reduce the odds of basic needs insecurity, and these supports are more common at universities compared to community colleges. The data provide some support: compared to on-campus students, off-campus students at universities experienced food and housing insecurity and homelessness at higher rates. The same is true with regard to meal plans; if a student had a meal plan, they reported lower odds of basic needs insecurities. Of course, students living on campus and buying meal plans often have more financial strength than those who do not. Moreover, it was surprising to see 26% of students with a meal plan and 26% of students living on campus and attending universities experienced food insecurity *within the last 30 days*. One in four university students living on campus experienced housing insecurity, and 8% experienced homelessness in the last year. Of course, it may be that these experiences occurred when students were not living on campus—for example in the summer. Seven percent of university students who dealt with homelessness said that they struggled because residence halls were closed during breaks (Table 4).

More than 60% of former foster youth who completed this survey were food insecure and housing insecure, and almost 1 in 4 had experienced homelessness in the last year.

Table 4. On-campus Experiences of Students Experiencing Homelessness

Experience	Institution Type	
	2-Year	4-Year
Have you ever not known where you would stay during winter/spring breaks because the on-campus residence halls were closed?	1%	7%
Were there times when you stayed in someone else's room in an on-campus residence hall because you didn't have anywhere else to sleep?	1%	12%
Were there times you stayed in someone else's room in an on-campus residence hall but had to leave because of administration rules?	1%	14%

Working and Going to College

Working during college is common and the vast majority (82% at community colleges and 79% at 4-year institutions – see Table 2) of students in this survey were employed or actively seeking work. We compared rates of basic needs insecurity based on whether or not a student was employed, and if they were not employed, based on whether or not they were seeking work. At both community colleges and universities rates of food and housing insecurity were higher among students working longer hours (Figures 7 and 8). For example, 34-38% of students working 6-20 hours per week were food insecure (low or very low food insecurity), compared to 48-51% of students working 40 hours or more per week. Moreover, community college students who were unemployed but seeking work exhibited rates of food and housing insecurity comparable to those of students working 40 hours or more per week. Job search is time-consuming and frustrating but does not pay, and without employment many students cannot qualify for SNAP. We also found that students experiencing food and housing insecurities tended to work later shifts, which are often less competitive and sometimes pay a bit more (Figure 9).

Figure 7. Employment Behavior by Food Security Status

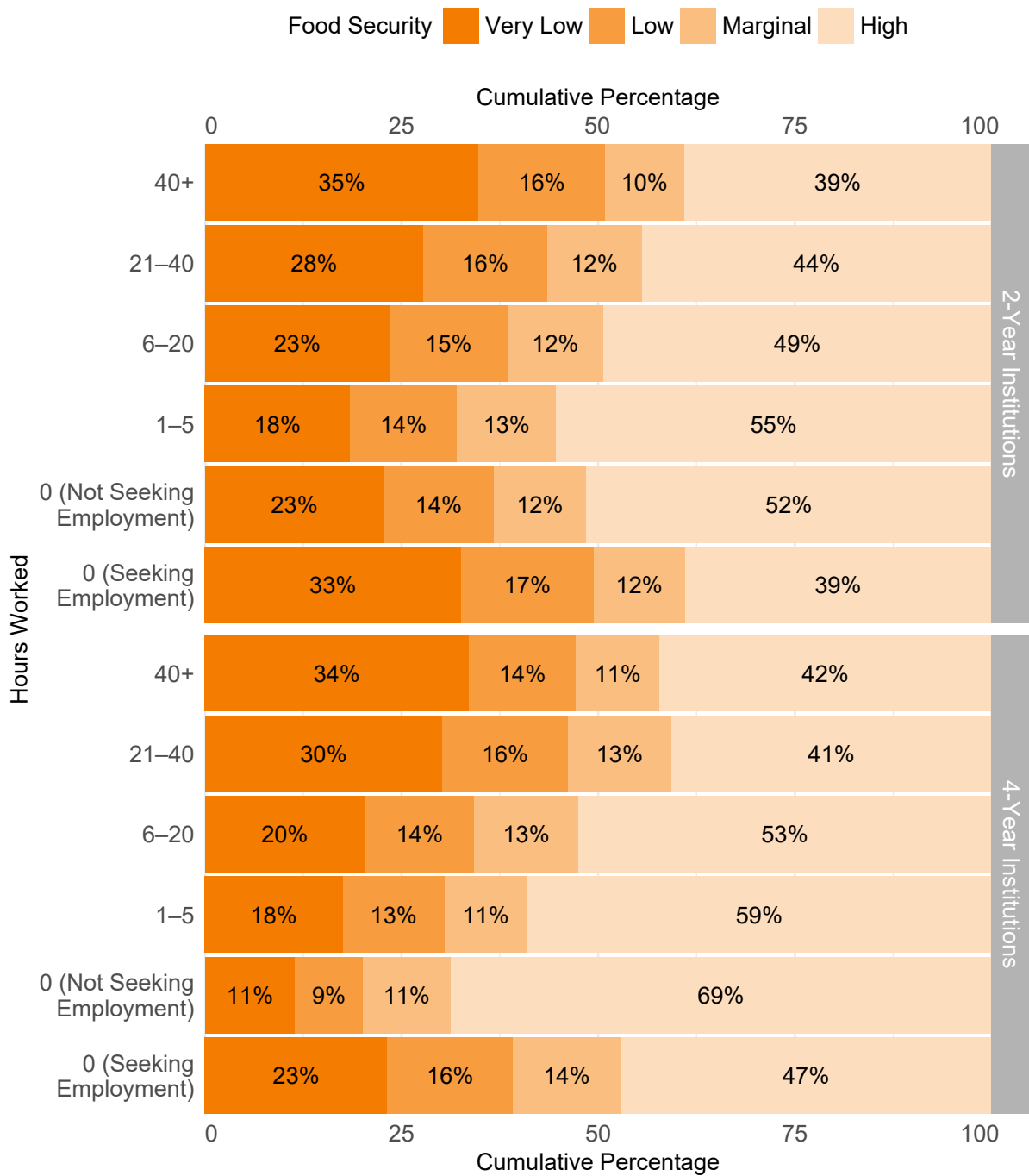


Figure 8. Employment Behavior for Students Experiencing Housing Insecurity and Homelessness

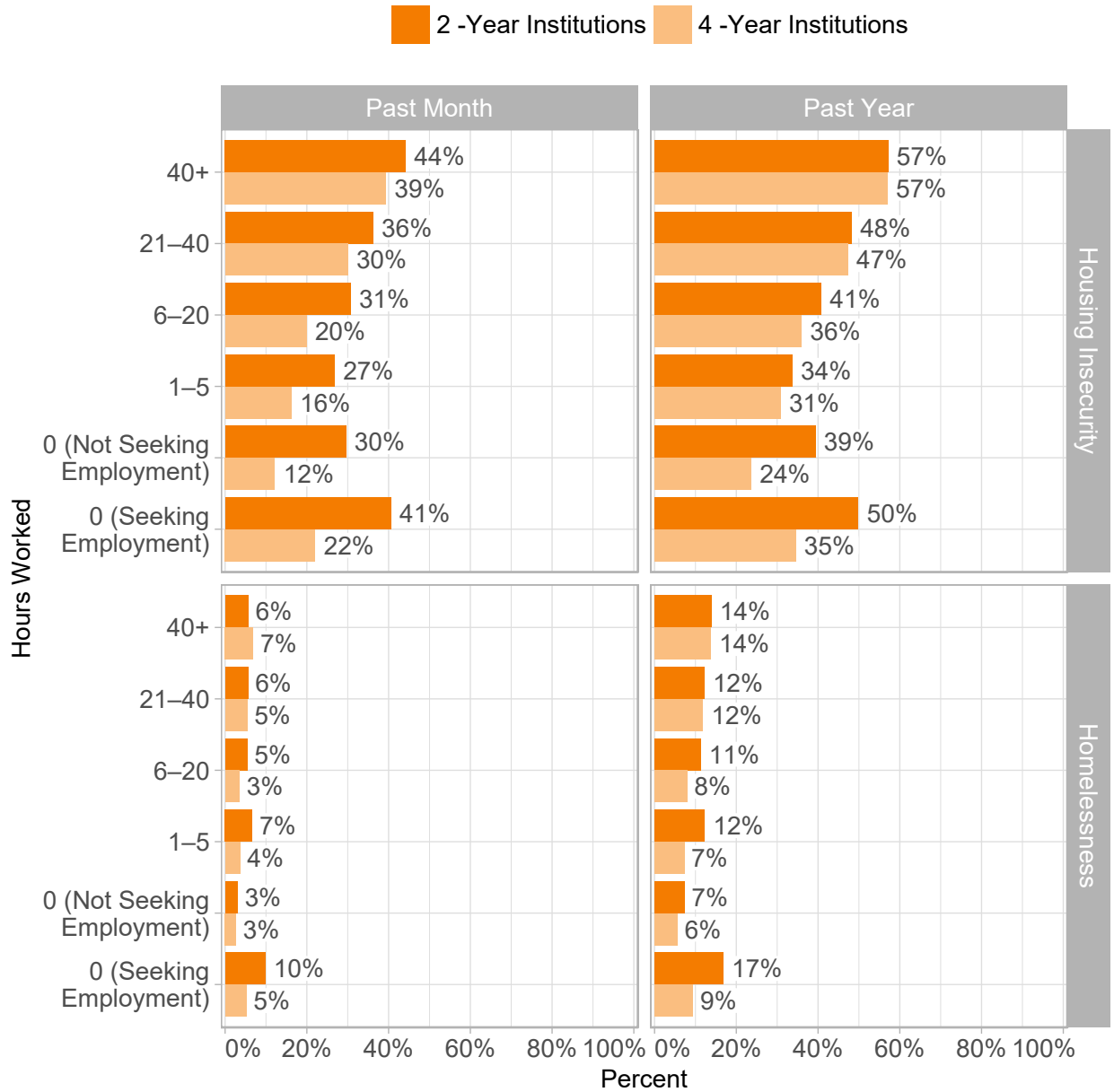
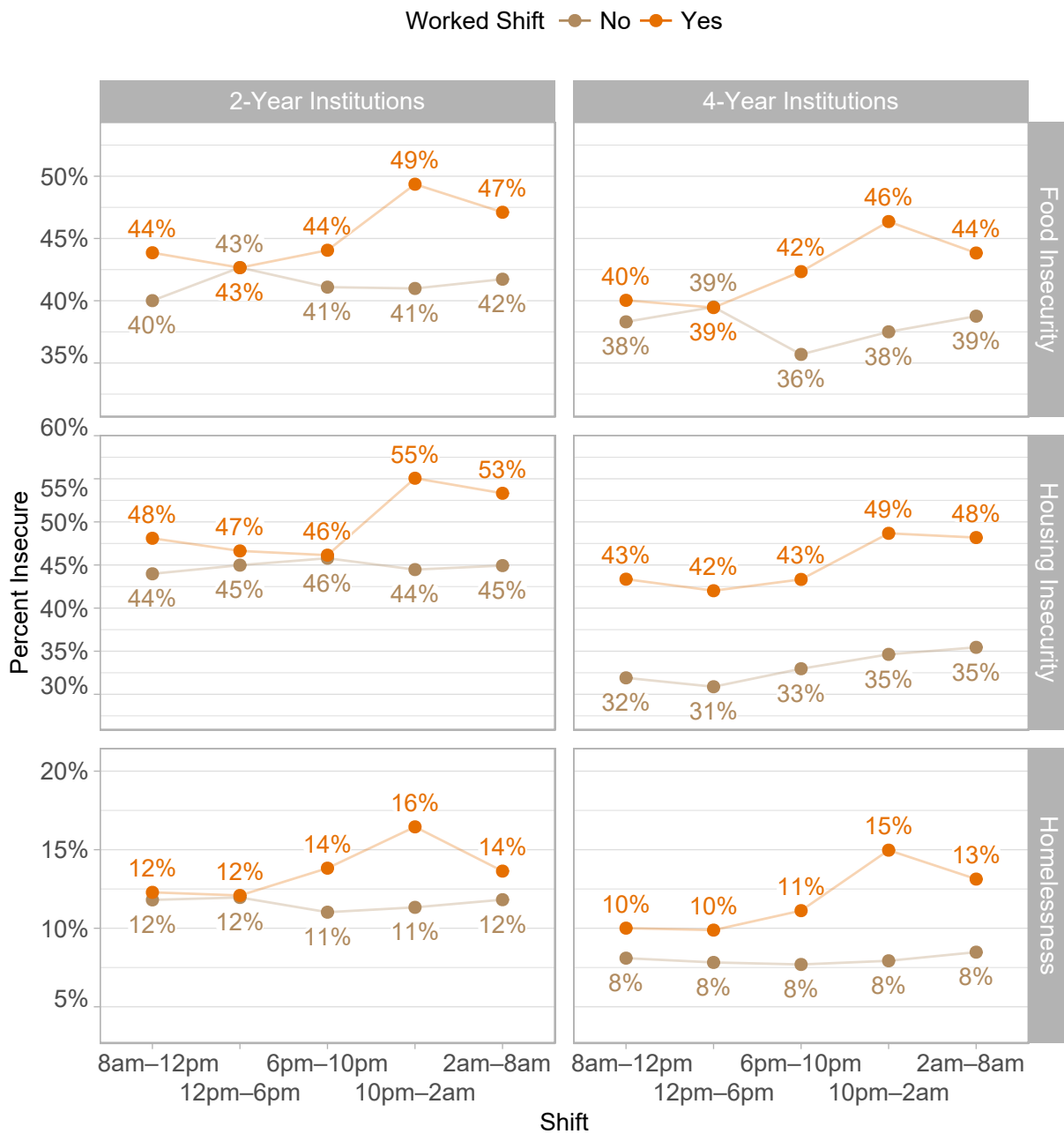
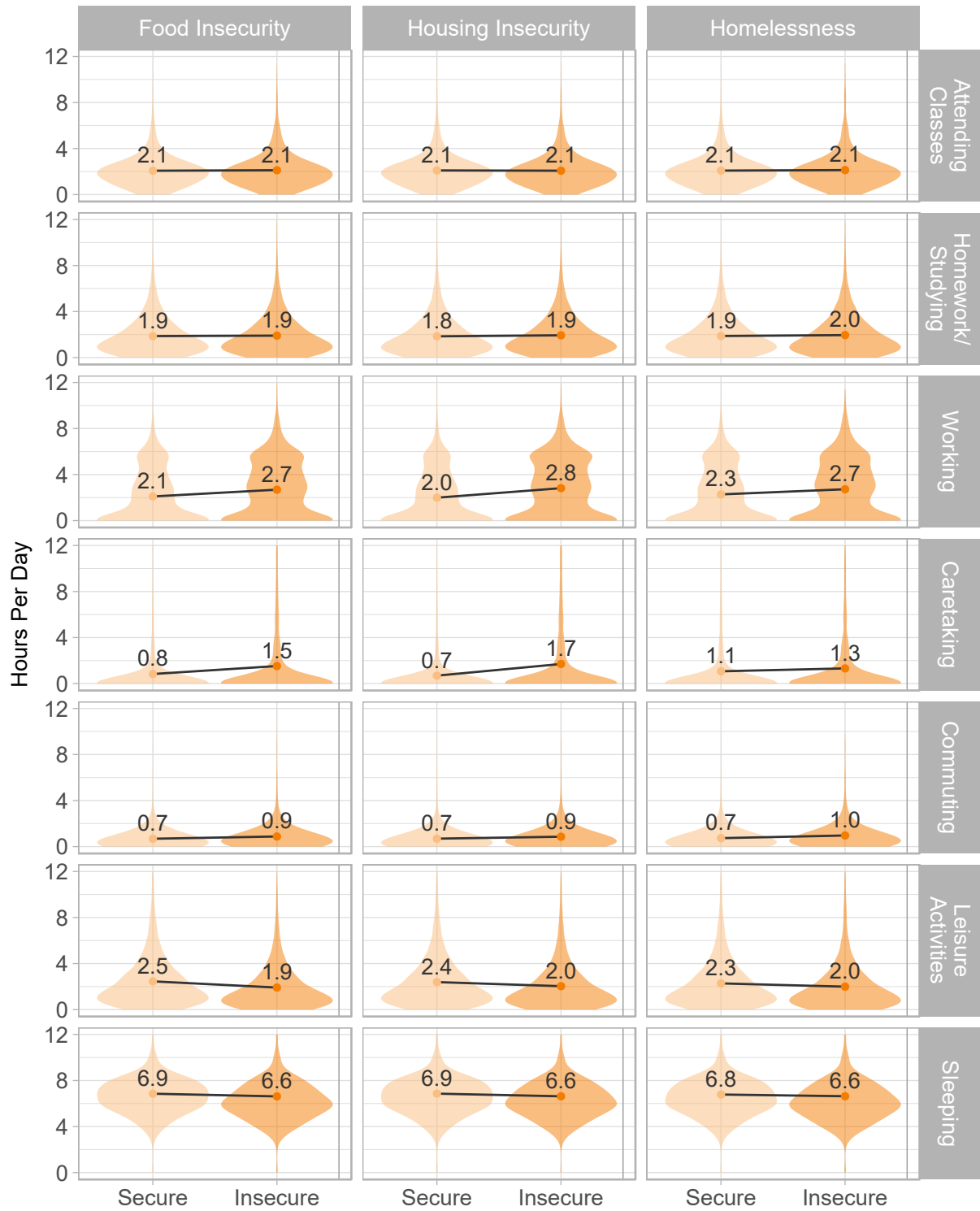


Figure 9. Work Shifts by Basic Needs Insecurities



Despite working more often and working later shifts, Figure 10 shows that students experiencing basic needs insecurity exhibited very similar levels of commitment to college compared to students who were not struggling with food or housing issues. They spent similar amounts of time attending class and doing homework. Yet they also spent more time taking care of children or adults and commuting, and correspondingly less time on leisure activities and sleeping.

Figure 10. Time Use by Basic Needs Insecurities



As expected, working longer hours and dealing with insufficient food and housing was associated with lower grades in college. As seen in Figures 11 and 12, sizable fractions of students who were doing very poorly in college, getting grades below the C average typically required for maintaining financial aid and avoiding academic probation, were dealing with food and/or housing insecurity. For example, among students who reported receiving D's and F's in college, more than half were food insecure, with more than 40% at the very lowest level of food security. Rates of housing insecurity among these students were even higher—over the last year upwards of 55% were housing insecure, and more than a fifth were homeless.

Students experiencing basic needs insecurity exhibited very similar levels of commitment to college compared to students who were not struggling with food or housing issues.

Figure 11: Food Insecurity by Self-Reported Grades

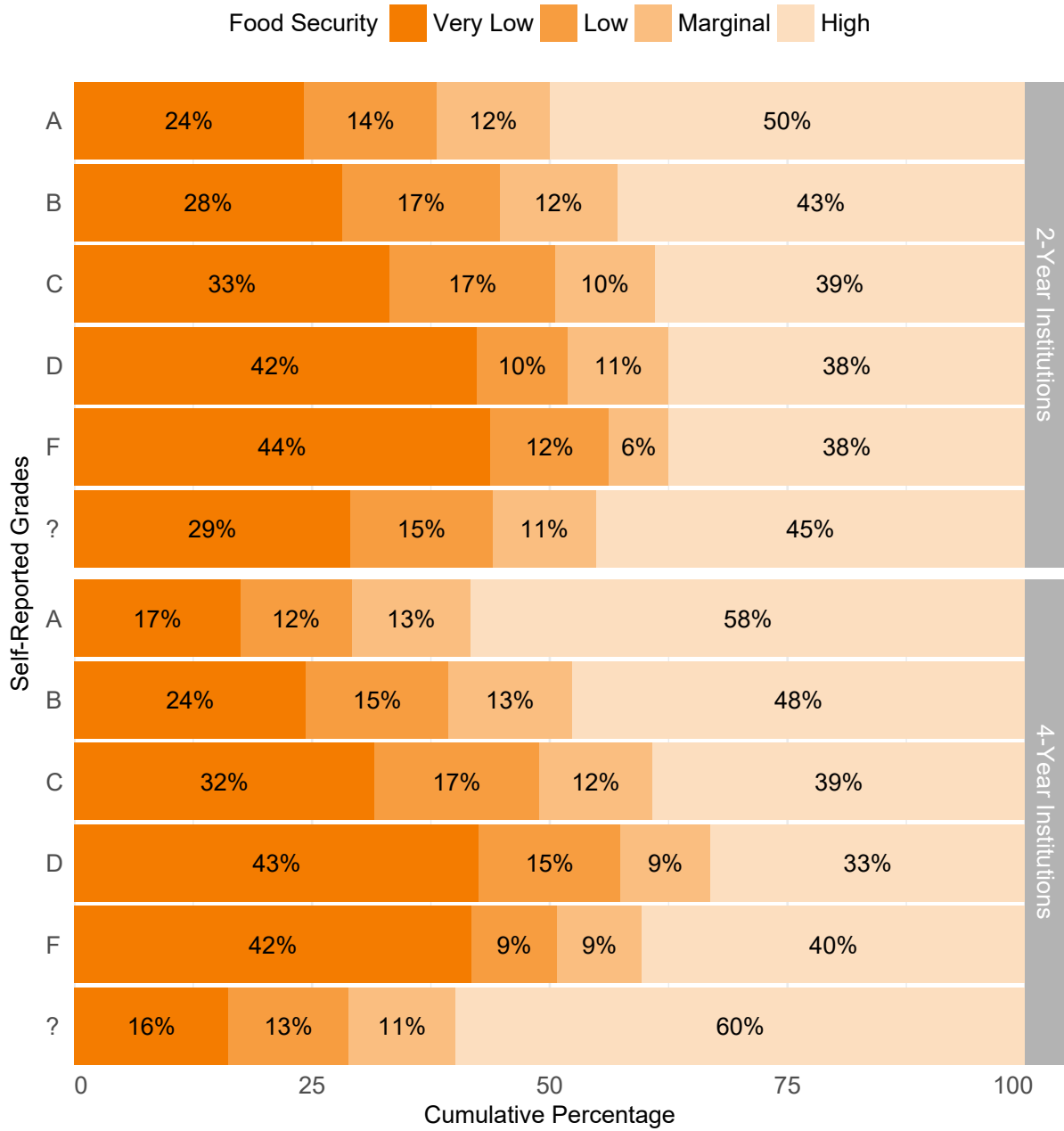
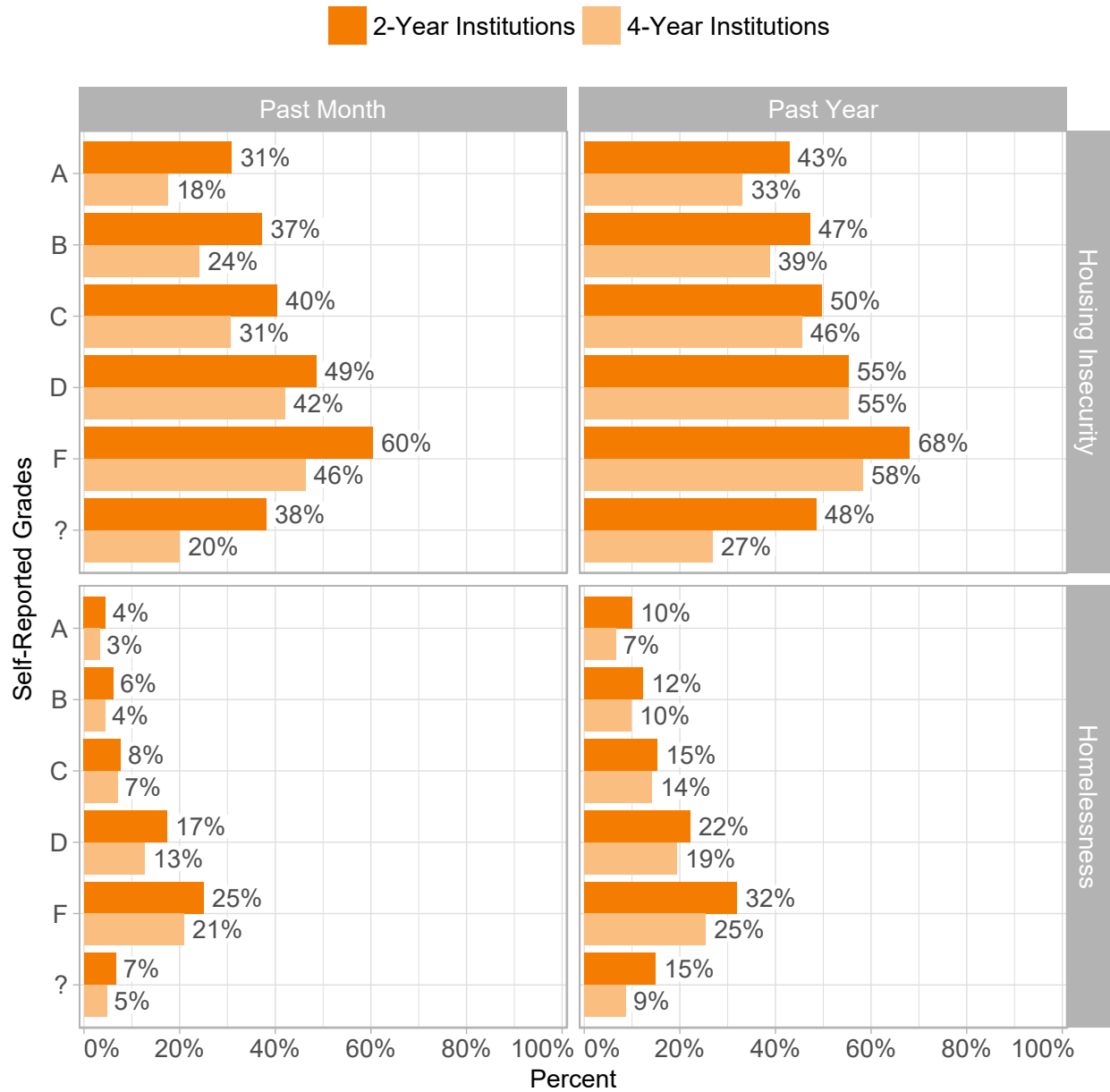


Figure 12: Housing Insecurity and Homelessness by Self-Reported Grades



Identifying and Supporting Students

One key challenge to supporting homeless students is that they often do not identify as homeless. In this survey, we posed direct questions about students' housing status and compared those results to the five indirect measures assessing their actual experiences (described earlier). When asked if they couch-surfed in the last year, between 5-7% of students said yes, and when asked if they were homeless in the last year, between 3-5% of students said yes (Table 5). But when we compared these to their experiences, we found that 7% of community college students and 6% of university students who said they were **not** homeless nonetheless reported an experience with homelessness during the last year (Table 6). It therefore seems important to communicate about the *experiences* a program aims to address rather than indicating that services are for a specific type of student.

Table 5. Self-Reported Measures of Homelessness

Experience	Time	Institution Type	
		2-Year	4-Year
Ever couch surf?	In last month	2%	2%
	In last year	7%	5%
Ever homeless?	In last month	2%	1%
	In last year	5%	3%

Table 6. Comparisons of Self-Reported and Experience-Based Measures of Homelessness

Institution Type	Experienced Homelessness in Past year	Couch Surfed in Last Year				Self-Identified as Homeless in Last Year			
		Yes		No		Yes		No	
		%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
2-Year	No	23%	168	93%	9,280	23%	41	93%	9,401
	Yes	77%	551	7%	741	77%	140	7%	1,155
4-Year	No	34%	361	94%	18,405	34%	58	94%	18,705
	Yes	66%	704	6%	1,125	66%	131	6%	1,699

While providing limited information on their lived experiences, the survey did attempt to solicit some information on the causes of homelessness among these students (Table 7). The results suggest that most often, students found themselves “in a difficult situation,” sometimes rooted in a “conflict or problem with someone I lived with.” One-third of the students said that they became homeless because of difficulty paying the rent or mortgage, and about one-fifth said that they had experienced issues with their personal safety.

Table 7. Causes of Homelessness Among Students Self-Reporting as Homeless

Reasons	Percent
I felt unsafe where I was living.	21%
I had difficulty paying the rent/mortgage.	33%
A conflict or problem with someone I lived with.	40%
I was in another difficult situation.	58%

Most students experiencing homelessness found refuge at a friend or relative's home, or that of a partner. If that was not possible, the next most common housing found was living in a car, or at a hotel or motel. Some students reported exchanging sex for housing. Less than 1 in 10 went to a shelter. Very few were unsheltered, residing outside or in public places like bus or train stations (Table 8).

Table 8. Where Do Homeless Students Stay?

Location	Percent
Juvenile detention center or jail	1%
Group home	2%
Residential treatment facility	2%
Train/bus or train/bus station	3%
Hospital or emergency room	3%
Abandoned building/vacant unit/squat	4%
24-hour restaurant/laundromat/other retail establishment	4%
Shelter	8%
Anywhere outside	8%
Transitional housing	9%
Home of someone I was having sex with in exchange for housing or survival needs	10%
Neighbor's home	10%
Other person's home	17%
House or apartment of a stranger or someone I didn't know well	17%
Hotel, motel, or hostel	22%
Car or other vehicle	30%
Home of boyfriend/girlfriend	34%
Relative's home	51%
Friend's home (non-neighbor)	62%

Students experiencing basic needs insecurity try to make ends meet in a variety of ways. While financial aid can help, it is often not enough to cover living costs. Sample students who received the Pell Grant, the primary source of federal financial aid for lower-income students, were more likely to experience food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness (Table 3).

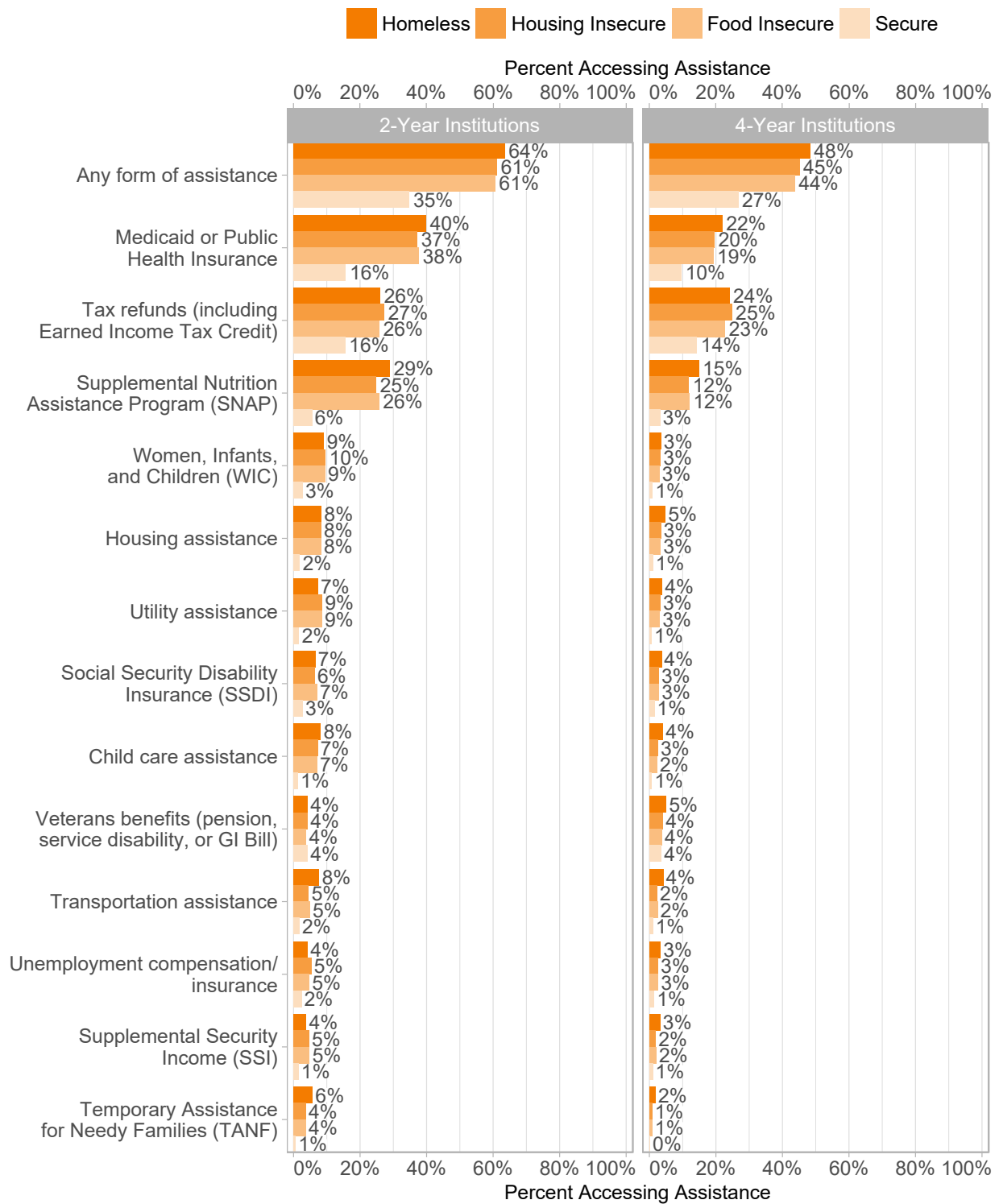
Students sometimes turn to public assistance to help cover food, housing, and other living costs such as health care, transportation, and child care. However, many of the primary assistance programs for low-income adults are less effective for college students due to significant work requirements. The largest federal anti-poverty program, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), provides increasing funding for recipients who work more, up to certain limits.⁴¹ The Supplementary Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the largest food support, typically requires that students without children work at least 20 hours per week.

Survey responses reflected the difficulty students have accessing public assistance. In general, relatively few students experiencing basic needs insecurity accessed public assistance (Figure 13). Only 26% of food-insecure students at community colleges and 12% at 4-year colleges received SNAP. Those numbers were similar for housing-insecure students and slightly higher for homeless students (29% and 15%, respectively). Likewise, of students who experienced homelessness in the past year, only 8% of community college students and 5% of 4-year students received housing assistance. These students reported similar usage of utility assistance. Tax refunds, including EITC, and Medicaid or public health insurance were the most used supports. Approximately one in four homeless, housing-insecure, and food-insecure students received tax refunds. Approximately 40% of housing-insecure and homeless students at community colleges received assistance through Medicaid or another public health insurance program. High rates of health care assistance may owe to the Affordable Care Act's individual mandate, which assessed penalties as high as \$695 for those without health insurance. Lower rates at universities may be due to university-sponsored health insurance programs.

On average, sample respondents from community colleges used public assistance at consistently higher rates than their counterparts at 4-year institutions. There are several potential explanations for these results. First, respondents from community colleges, who were more likely to have children and/or attend school part-time and be employed, were more likely to meet work requirements (Table 2). Community college students were also more likely to experience homelessness, and homeless students were more likely to use public assistance than any other category of student) (Figure 5).

Sizable fractions of students who were doing very poorly in college, getting grades below the C average typically required for maintaining financial aid and avoiding academic probation, were dealing with food and/or housing insecurity.

Figure 13. Use of Assistance Among Survey Respondents Who Were Housing Insecure, Homeless, or Food Insecure in the Past Year



Recommendations for Securing College Students' Basic Needs

What Students Can Do

The people “the closest to the problem are closest to the solution,” and students are leading efforts to ensure that basic needs insecurities are addressed on campuses around the country.⁴² Here are some examples of how students can take action.

Students can create programs

Most of the food pantries around the nation, many of which are part of the [College and University Food Bank Alliance \(CUFBA\)](#), were started by students, and student-led food drives often stock those pantries. [Challah for Hunger](#) is a student-centered organization with chapters around the nation that focuses on raising awareness of food insecurity, including on campus. Recently, its Temple University chapter raised more than \$14,000 to help launch that institution's food pantry.⁴³ [Students for Students](#), formerly known as the Bruin Shelter, supports students in the Los Angeles region. It is staffed by student-volunteers, and was the brainchild of Louis Tse, who as a student at the University of California-Los Angeles lived in his car to save money to start the shelter. The [Human Services Resource Center](#) was started in 2009 by the Associated Students of Oregon State University. Those leaders took a series of smaller programs including a food subsidy, a health insurance subsidy, and a food pantry, and combined them into a center dedicated to addressing the challenges of poverty, hunger, homelessness, and food insecurity. While this program now has full-time staff, the center has remained true to the “by students, for students” portion of its mission, operating with support from student fees and engaging students in distributing thousands of dollars and pounds of food annually. The student advocacy groups [National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness](#) and the [Student Government Resource Center](#) have also focused energy on student hunger, offering toolkits and support in partnership with [CUFBA](#).

Students can support each other

When one student has extra meals at the end of the week and another is out, a “swipe” donation can be a welcome form of support. Students sharing swipes at UCLA spawned a national movement, as CEO Rachel Sumekh worked to formalize the process, engaging campus food-service providers, and launching the national nonprofit [Swipe Out Hunger](#). Recently, students at Spelman and Morehouse Colleges held a hunger strike in order to generate more institutional support for a swipe program on that campus.⁴⁴ Another student-led program, [Donor to Diner](#), has developed a “[One Meal Initiative](#)” which directs its chapters to donate meals through their dining center to support their peers. At New York University and Columbia University a meal sharing app is used to guide students to available food.⁴⁵

Students can educate and advocate

Students can get involved in teaching and training across their campuses. Some, like those at Elgin Community College, have led surveys to assess local need.⁴⁶ At Augustana College students started the Food Friends program, which engages faculty and staff in educational sessions about basic needs insecurities and how they impact students. They use current research along with student stories to

provide faculty and administration with awareness of the issues as well as what to do if they meet a student who is basic needs insecure. Students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison have been working to raise awareness about the expense of the campus meal plans and create opportunities for students receiving SNAP to use those benefits on campus.⁴⁷

Students have also sought creative ways to share information with other students who are struggling. The CalFresh Outreach Program helps students on campuses around California learn about public benefits they may be eligible for.⁴⁸ At the 2017 [#RealCollege](#) conference, a graduate student at California State University-Long Beach created a modified campus map, overlaying locations where students could find basic needs resources so students could navigate the campus and find what they need. A fellow undergraduate uses her platform on a campus radio show to educate her peers about homelessness in college.⁴⁹ Students at Houston Community College do the same, using multiple platforms including Twitter, Instagram, and a blog.⁵⁰

Students can lobby for change in policies at the institutional, state, and federal levels. [Young Invincibles](#), a national organization started by students, is examining the under-utilization of SNAP benefits among students.⁵¹ Students have also testified before state legislatures and at Congressional briefings in Washington DC to call for greater supports to address food insecurity.⁵²

What Colleges and Universities Can Do

Even while facing financial constraints, colleges and universities can act to ensure that their students' basic needs are met. Addressing food and housing insecurity helps promote positive student development, retention and graduation, and is closely aligned with institutional missions focused on both access and excellence. Here are some steps that colleges and universities can take to understand and address the issue on their campuses.

Collect evidence to understand the problem

Given national trends, it is likely that every institution has at least some students experiencing food and housing insecurity. But knowing approximately how many need support is critical to appropriately planning, resourcing, and executing plans to address these issues. The Wisconsin HOPE Lab offers institutions several options for collecting this data. Colleges may participate in our next survey, this fall. If your institution is interested in participating in a 2018 survey of basic needs, please contact Christine Baker-Smith at christine.baker-smith@temple.edu or (215) 204-1822. A [guide](#) to assessing basic needs security is also available on the Wisconsin HOPE Lab's website.⁵³ Campuses may choose to work with their own local researcher to collect this information, and employ context-specific strategies to boost response rates. Tips available in the guide may be useful in formulating the approach while maintaining rigorous standards.

It is also important to get to know students' stories. How and why students experience food and housing insecurity varies by campus, and those narratives can guide the development of effective supports.

Organize to take action

Leadership, often formalized by a guiding committee or task force, is an effective approach to formulating an institution's response. The most effective committees include at least one senior-level administrator

who has access to or influence over resources such as money, space, and personnel. Other participants should include people who come into contact with struggling students, including librarians and security staff, faculty, and student affair practitioners. Include students, but be sure that the work does not add to their considerable financial strains or render them more vulnerable—compensating them for their time and ensuring that they have a role in agenda-setting are key supports. A campus that wishes to connect students with off-campus resources would be wise to include community members from anti-hunger or homelessness organizations, governmental agencies in human services, or business owners such as mechanics or optometrists who could provide students with support at discounted rates.

Design programs to proactively support students

Proactively addressing students' basic needs is far more cost-effective than simply developing small programs that serve only as bandages. Mapping existing campus resources is a good start. This exercise should not only identify what resources exist, and which are missing, but also focus on ensuring that current resources are *known, accessible, and useful*.

Known: Proactively supporting students requires marketing a program's services to students rather than holding them aside and offering them only on an as-needed basis. A lack of advertising is a barrier to usage, particularly among students who do not know who or how to ask. Consider adding a statement about available resources to course syllabi, alongside resources for students with academic difficulties or disabilities.⁵⁴ While there is a chance that resources might be over-utilized, marketing language can create clear guidelines around who the resource is for, and what it looks like to use it appropriately. The location of the services is also critical to ensure that students know they are available. Many campuses hide their basic needs resources, including food pantries, making it hard to find them. Others place them front and center on campus, helping normalize their presence and reducing stigma.

Accessible: Privacy and dignity are important to consider when choosing a location for services, how to market them, and how to deliver them to students. Engaging students in the design of programs will bring forward barriers to access that campus administration might not consider. Services should be offered in welcoming, non-judgmental ways that celebrate the student's decision to seek the supports they need to complete. Cultural competency is needed to serve across various identities, with staff providing services well-versed in communication across differences in race, sexual orientation, religion, language, nationality, family status, and others. Programs should also be created with universal design in mind, making sure that students with disabilities are able to use them as well.

Useful: Programs should not be so complex as to become useless and yet costly. Some utilize lengthy applications and impose rigorous requirements to guard students' access to inexpensive resources. This approach heightens the transactional costs, and at the same time limits the odds that the students will find the resources useful. Applications and requirements should be assessed for efficacy and kept to a minimum in order to maximize efficiency.⁵⁵

The [Advocacy and Resource Center \(ARC\)](#) at Amarillo College is a good example of a smart and proactive approach to preventing basic needs insecurity. ARC staff conduct outreach, leveraging predictive analytics and direct and indirect marketing, to students who are at-risk of basic needs insecurities. It is located in the heart of campus in a glass-enclosed suite of offices that are easy to

find. Staff distribute resources, including emergency aid, with minimal applications, few requirements, and a quick turnaround time.

Many campuses have partnered with the national nonprofit [Single Stop](#) to build their programs, utilizing a technology platform that screens students for public benefits and supports the staff in case management to ensure students are enrolled. On campuses where hiring staff is not an immediate option, there should be a single point of contact designated to serve students experiencing basic needs insecurities. This should be a significant portion, if not all, of a person's position, and they should be a part of a larger unit that supports students, like a Dean of Students office or a counseling center. In all cases the staff at these offices should be included on student CARE teams or other committees focused on students of concern. Initiatives like the [Working Students Success Network](#) and [Benefits Access for College Completion](#) offer other examples.

Partner to grow and develop programs to serve students

While many campuses are developing their own programs such as food pantries, emergency aid, and campus emergency housing, it is often easier to develop and expand services by partnering with community agencies and programs. Here are examples of innovative partnerships currently supporting students:

- [Houston Community College and the Houston Food Bank](#) work together to provide students with “food scholarships,” so that they and their families have sufficient groceries to maintain a healthy lifestyle.
- [Jovenes, Inc.](#) works with community colleges throughout Los Angeles to provide homeless students with rapid re-housing services, including case management supports and housing subsidies.
- Tacoma Community College and the Tacoma Housing Authority are administering the [College Housing Assistance Program](#), making Section 8 housing vouchers to homeless and near-homeless college students.
- The [Southern Scholarship Foundation](#) partners with universities in multiple Florida cities to offer students rent-free housing.

Host homes are increasingly popular in the movement to end youth homelessness, and they could be implemented by neighbors, faculty and staff, alumni, or even other students in college communities. In Chicago the [Dax Host Home Program](#) houses students at DePaul University for up to 12 weeks.

It is important that colleges also work with partners on campus. Food servicer providers can implement a “[swipes](#)” program, offer meal vouchers, keep dining halls open during breaks, and/or develop a low-cost affordable meal option – a \$1 meal, for example. On-campus housing can keep residence halls open during breaks and work with lawyers to make it possible to provide emergency housing to students in need, even when they live off-campus. Many colleges find it useful to work closely with their foundations, their faculty unions and/or their alumni to fundraise for programs like these and for emergency aid.⁵⁶ At Florida International University, students with library fines were recently allowed to have their fines forgiven in exchange for contributing to the campus food pantry.⁵⁷ Employee payroll deduction programs are also effective sources of support.

For Policymakers

Expand public benefits access for students

Financial aid often falls short of students' needs and it is especially important to connect students to public benefits programs, and modify the requirements of those programs to support degree completion rather than work against it. Policymakers should create incentives for colleges and universities to develop programs and processes to help students enroll in public benefits programs in order to complete degrees and become productive members of the workforce. This could include partnerships to employ benefits navigators or enrollers on campuses where there is sufficient demand. The CalFresh Outreach Program on campuses throughout California provides a model. The [Center for Law and Social Policy](#) offers additional suggestions in their report [Benefits Access for College Completion: Lessons Learned from a Community College Initiative to Help Low-Income Students](#).⁵⁸

The work requirements associated with SNAP are often very difficult for students to comply with, especially given complex childcare and class schedules and the fierce competition for low-wage work.⁵⁹ States need to expand the implementation of SNAP exemptions, for example, by allowing enrollment in a technical degree program or eligibility for Federal Work-Study to meet the requirement. Making SNAP application processes more flexible will also facilitate enrollment.

One critical benefit often missing from college campuses is child care. Expanding support for the [Federal Child Care Access Means Parents in School \(CCAMPIS\)](#) program is essential for the almost 5 million undergraduates raising dependent children. Very few low-income students who should be eligible for this support receive it due to a severe funding shortfall.⁶⁰ Congress needs to invest in that program, and states also need to support promising initiatives such as the [Family Scholar Houses](#) in Kentucky.

Improve Title IV Financial Aid processes and procedures

Many students have substantial financial need but have limited access to financial aid, or none at all. When students complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), some attempt to establish economic independence from their parents so that resources unavailable to them are not considered when determining aid eligibility. Students who are homeless are eligible to be considered independent only if they first navigate a complex bureaucracy that demands they produce paperwork and/or obtain access to a financial aid officer willing to document their situation with an in-person interview.⁶¹ Many other students who have been thrown out of their homes because of their gender identity and/or sexual preference find themselves unable to provide evidence of family estrangement.

Students are sometimes put at a disadvantage by inaccurate assessments of the true Cost of Attendance (COA) at their colleges. When the COA is understated, it is difficult for students to adequately prepare to pay for college, they are subject to more surprises and uncertainties, and their financial aid may fall well short of true need.⁶² Policymakers should instead utilize validated measures of living expenses, adjusted for region, when establishing the COA at their state institutions.⁶³

Fund students' living expenses

Scholarships that only cover tuition and fees fall far short of the needs of many students, and this disproportionately affects many vulnerable groups. State policymakers are beginning to provide support for housing to try and help. Washington State lawmakers have proposed two bills. One would require public colleges to grant a one-year waiver for on-campus housing for homeless students receiving that state's College Bound Scholarship.⁶⁴ Another increases students' access to showers and lockers, similar to a law passed in California in 2017.⁶⁵

An expansion of the National School Lunch Program and/or the creation of state programs that offer free breakfast and lunch to food-insecure college students would be a common sense way to help students succeed in college.⁶⁶ Similarly, housing voucher programs could be expanded via several mechanisms, including the Moving to Work initiative that makes the [College Housing Assistance Program](#) in Tacoma possible.

Do Something

The bottom line is clear: Educational attainment in the United States is being hindered by neglect of key lessons from Abraham Maslow. Students' basic needs must be secured if they are to learn at any level—elementary, secondary, or postsecondary. For more than a decade, researchers have demonstrated the need and explained its scope and dimensions. The next and very necessary step is action.

Appendix A: Three Survey Measures of Basic Needs Insecurity Among Community College Students

With the release of this report, based on a 2017 survey administration, the Wisconsin HOPE Lab has now fielded three surveys of basic needs insecurity, each of which contained data from community colleges. The first survey was fielded in 2015 and reported in *Hungry to Learn*.⁶⁷ The second was fielded in 2016 and resulted in the report *Hungry and Homeless in College*.⁶⁸

We are often asked to summarize the results of the three surveys to provide the most complete picture possible of food and housing insecurity among community college students. However, methodological changes across surveys create a challenge for aggregation. Each year, the Lab has attempted to improve student recruitment, invitation messaging, and the survey itself. These changes limit the comparability of report results.

In 2017, we made several revisions to the survey invitation. We added language regarding available incentives, varied the language across the initial invitation and reminders, and included a [video of Sara Goldrick-Rab on *The Daily Show*](#) as evidence of the HOPE Lab's commitment to bringing students' voices and needs into the public sphere. We also asked institutions to send three reminders instead of two.

The primary challenge to combining results across surveys, however, is that each survey contains slightly different items and summary measures of basic needs. Researchers have not converged on the best methods for measuring food and housing needs for college students, and as a consequence, best practices frequently evolve. The focus on basic needs among college students is relatively new, and measures (e.g. the USDA's food security module) that have been validated for adult and household populations have not been validated for college students. As a result, the Wisconsin HOPE Lab's surveys have changed over time in an attempt to improve measurement and provide the most accurate information possible given current best practices for surveying college students.⁶⁹ In particular, over time the Lab has made the following changes to its measures of basic needs insecurity:

1. Food security

The 2015 and 2016 surveys employed the USDA's 6-item food security module. In 2017, however, the Lab used the USDA's 10-item module, which more clearly delineates between the low and very lowest levels of food security and reduces survey burden via the use of screener questions.⁷⁰

2. Housing insecurity

The 2016 survey inadvertently omitted the question, "In the past 12 months, was there a rent or mortgage increase that made it difficult to pay?"⁷¹ From a quantitative standpoint, the omission of this item has only a small impact on the summary measure of housing insecurity (from 54% to 45% in the 2015 survey (52% to 47% when using the survey weights that were part of the 2015 analysis) and 46% to 40% in the 2017 survey), although qualitatively the results reflect the same conclusions across all three surveys.

3. Homelessness

The 2015 and 2016 reports counted students as homeless if they answered “yes” to any of 6 questions. The 2017 report based its homelessness summary measure on 5 of those 6 questions but did not count as homeless students who affirmatively answered the question, “Currently, where do you live?” with the response, “Do not have a home”. This item is inconsistent with the 30- day and 12-month time periods reflected in the other homelessness measures and has only a small impact on the overall housing measure. Recalculating the 2015 homeless measure omitting this item results in a 0.4 percentage point decrease in the rate of homelessness from 13.0% to 12.6% and results in a decrease in the 2016 survey’s rate of homelessness from 14.4% to 13.4%.

4. Others

For the 2017 survey, we added measures of gender identity and sexuality, and also asked about the age at which students formerly in foster care were discharged from the supervision of the child welfare agency.⁷²

Appendix Table A1. Estimates of Basic Needs Insecurity Among Community College Students Across Three Surveys

Food insecurity (past 30 days)				
	2015	2016	2017	All
High	48%	33%	46%	37%
Marginal	13%	12%	12%	12%
Low	20%	23%	15%	21%
Very low	19%	33%	27%	30%
N	3,921	26,067	10,895	40,883
Housing insecurity (past 12 months)				
	2015	2016	2017	All
Yes	45%	51%	40%	47%
No	55%	49%	60%	53%
N	4,066	25,124	10,900	40,090
Homelessness (past 12 months)				
	2015	2016	2017	All
Yes	13%	13%	12%	13%
No	87%	87%	88%	87%
N	4,063	24,608	10,931	39,602

Table A1 above shows aggregate measures of basic needs across the 3 HOPE Lab surveys. The housing insecurity and homeless measures are adjusted to achieve item-consistency across administrations. For example, results from the 2015 and 2016 surveys were recalculated omitting the item, “Currently where do you live?” to be consistent with the 2017 survey. Measures of food security are aggregated across surveys, regardless of which USDA food security module was used.

In general, measures of basic needs were consistent across the 2015, 2016, and 2017 surveys. As a result, the figures in Table A1 are broadly similar to those featured in previous reports. Approximately 51% of students reported low or very low food insecurity. Slightly less than one half of students reported housing insecurity, and 13% reported that they were homeless over the past 12 months. These results are consistent with the research literature described in this report showing a significant public health issue across community colleges.

Appendix B – List of Participants

2-Year Colleges

Amarillo College (TX)
Bristol Community College (MA)
Bunker Hill Community College (MA)
Butler County Community College (PA)
Cape Cod Community College (MA)
Central Piedmont Community College (NC)
Cumberland County College (NJ)
Delaware Technical Community College (DE)
Front Range Community College (CO)
Greenfield Community College (MA)
Holyoke Community College (MA)
Massasoit Community College (MA)
MassBay Community College (MA)
Metropolitan Community College (NE)
Middlesex Community College (MA)
Mount Wachusett Community College (MA)
North Shore Community College (MA)
Northern Essex Community College (MA)
Oakton Community College (IL)
Onondaga Community College (NY)
Pierce College (WA)
Quinsigamond Community College (MA)
Raritan Valley Community College (NJ)
Rochester Community & Technical College (MN)
Roxbury Community College (MA)
San Diego City College (CA)
San Diego Mesa College (CA)
San Diego Miramar College (CA)
San Diego Continuing Education (CA)
Suffolk County Community College (NY)
SUNY Orange (NY)

4-Year Colleges and Universities*

Atlanta Metropolitan State College (GA)
Bridgewater State University (MA)
Cedar Crest College (PA)
Clayton State University (GA)
College of Saint Mary (NE)
Columbus State University (GA)
East Georgia State College (GA)
Eastern Michigan University (MI)
Fitchburg State University (MA)
George Washington University (DC)
Georgia Gwinnett College (GA)
Georgia Southwestern State University (GA)
Georgia State University (GA)
Georgia Tech (GA)
Gordon State College (GA)
Governors State University (IL)
Huston-Tillotson University (TX)
Kennesaw State University (GA)
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MA)
Northeastern Illinois University (IL)
Ohio University (OH)
Salem State University (MA)
Seton Hall University (NJ)
SUNY Oneonta (NY)
Temple University (PA)
University of Central Missouri (MO)
University of Maine (ME)
University of Massachusetts Boston (MA)
University of Massachusetts Dartmouth (MA)
University of Massachusetts Lowell (MA)
University of Michigan - Dearborn (MI)
University of Southern Mississippi (MS)
University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee (WI)
Valdosta State University (GA)

** One public university asked not to be named.*

End Notes

- ¹ Please note that, throughout the report, “community colleges” refers to all 2-year, public colleges and “universities” and “4-year colleges” refer to all 4-year colleges and universities, public and private. We use these terms interchangeably throughout the report.
- ² Goldrick-Rab, S., Richardson, J., & Hernandez, A. (2017). *Hungry and homeless in college: Results from a national study of basic needs insecurity in higher education*. Wisconsin HOPE Lab. Retrieved from <http://www.wihopelab.com/publications/Hungry-and-Homeless-in-College-Report.pdf>
- ³ Goldrick-Rab, S. (2016). *Paying the price: College costs, financial aid, and the betrayal of the American dream*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press; Wisconsin HOPE Lab. (2016). What we're leaning: Food and housing insecurity among college students. Wisconsin HOPE Lab Data Brief 16-01. Retrieved from http://wihopelab.com/publications/Wisconsin_HOPE_Lab_Data%20Brief%2016-01_Undergraduate_Housing%20and_Food_Insecurity.pdf
- ⁴ Goldrick-Rab, S. & Broton, K. (2017, Aug 1). On estimating food insecurity among undergraduates. [Web log comment]. Retrieved from <https://medium.com/@saragoldrickrab/on-estimating-food-insecurity-among-undergraduates-a7db0cf79632>.
- ⁵ Goldrick-Rab, S., Broton, K., Cady, C., Canedo, R. E., Crutchfield, R., Freudenberg, N., Hernandez, D. C., Maguire, J., Martinez, S., Nazmi, A., & Richardson, J. (2018, January 22). Who's hungry? Making sense of campus food insecurity estimates. [Web log comment]. Retrieved from <https://medium.com/@saragoldrickrab/whos-hungry-making-sense-of-campus-food-insecurity-estimates-4b65cd1ecf2c>
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- ⁹ An annotated bibliography of all such studies can be found at <http://wihopelab.com/publications/Basic-Needs-Studies-Annotated-Bibliography.pdf>
- ¹⁰ Martinez, S., Maynard, K., & Ritchie, L. (2016). *Student food access and security study*. University of California Global Food Initiative. Retrieved from <http://www.ucop.edu/global-food-initiative/best-practices/food-access-security/student-food-access-and-security-study.pdf>

¹¹ Crutchfield, R. & Maguire, J. (2018). *Study of student basic needs*. California State University Basic Needs Initiative. Retrieved from https://www2.calstate.edu/impact-of-the-csu/student-success/basic-needs-initiative/Documents/phasell-report-with-Appendix.pdf?utm_source=BenchmarkEmail&utm_campaign=csu-basic-needs-study-4year-students-02082018&utm_medium=email

¹² Dubick, J., Mathews, B., & Cady, C. (2016). *Hunger on campus: The challenge of food insecurity for college students*. College and University Food Bank Alliance. Retrieved from https://studentsagainsthunger.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Hunger_On_Campus.pdf

¹³ See Freudenberg et al. (2011) and Tsui et al. (2011).

¹⁴ Estimates of basic needs insecurity at large or flagship universities:

Payne-Sturges, D. C., Tjaden, A., Caldeira, K. M., & Arria, A. M. (2017). Student hunger on campus: Food insecurity among college students and implications for academic institutions. *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 32(2), 349-354; King, J. (2017). *Food insecurity among college students – exploring the predictors of food assistance resource use*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Kent State University. Retrieved from https://etd.ohiolink.edu/pg_10?0::NO:10:P10_ETD_SUBID:149689; Silva, M. R., Kleinert, W. L., Sheppard, A. V., Cantrell, K. A., Freeman-Coppadge, D. J., Tsoy, E., & Pearrow, M. (2015). The relationship between food security, housing stability, and school performance among college students in an urban university. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice* (online only); Gaines, A., Robb, C. A., Knol, L. L., & Sickler, S. (2014). Examining the role of financial factors, resources and skills in predicting food security status among college students. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 38(4), 374-384. See Chaparro et al. (2009).

Higher estimates at large 4-year institutions can be found in:

See King (2017); Breuning, M., Brennhofner, S., van Woerden, I., Todd, M., & Laska, M. (2016). Factors related to the high rates of food insecurity among diverse, urban college freshmen. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 116(9), 1450-1457; Morris, L. M., Smith, S., Davis, J., & Null, D. B. (2016). The prevalence of food security and insecurity among Illinois university students, *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 48(6), 376-382.

Estimates of basic needs insecurity for first year students:

Breuning, M., van Woerden, I., Todd, M., & Laska, M. (2018). Hungry to learn: The prevalence and effects of food insecurity on health behaviors and outcomes over time among a diverse sample of university freshmen. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 15(9), 1-10; El Zein, A., Shelnutt, K., Colby, S., Olfert, M., Kattelmann, K., Brown, O., Kidd, T., Horacek, T., White, A., Zhou, W., Vilaro, M., Greene, G., Morrell, J., Riggsbee, K., & Mathews, A. (2017). Socio-demographic correlates and predictors of food insecurity among first year college students. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 117(10), A146.

¹⁵ McArthur, L. H., Ball, L., Danek, A. C., & Holbert, D. (2017). A high prevalence of food insecurity among university students in Appalachia reflects a need for educational interventions and policy advocacy. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*. In press.; Patton-López, M. M., López-Cevallos, D. F., Cancel-Tirado, D. I., & Vazquez, L. (2014). Prevalence and correlates of food insecurity among students attending a midsize rural university in Oregon. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 46(3), 209-214.

¹⁶ For studies not listed in the text, please see:

Mercado, V. (2017). *Food and housing insecurity among students at a community college district*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. San Francisco State University. Retrieved from <https://sfsu-dspace.calstate.edu/bitstream/handle/10211.3/196520/AS352017EDDM47.pdf?sequence=3>;

Wood, J. L., Harris III, F., & Delgado, N. R. (2016). *Struggling to survive – striving to succeed: Food and housing insecurities in the community college*. Community College Equity Assessment Lab. Retrieved from <https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/food-and-housing-report.pdf>;

Maroto, M. E., Snelling, A., & Linck, H. (2015). Food insecurity among community college students: Prevalence and association with grade point average. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 39(6), 515-526.

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¹⁸ See Goldrick-Rab, et al. (2017).

¹⁹ See El Zein et al. (2017), Morris et al. (2016), Maroto et al. (2015), and Patton-Lopez et al. (2014)

²⁰ Broton, K. M. (2017). *The evolution of poverty in higher education: Material hardship, academic success, and policy perspectives*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Wisconsin – Madison.

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²⁷ Cliburn, C. C. & Alleman, N. F. (2017). *A private struggle at a private institution: Effects of student hunger on social and academic experiences*. Paper presented to the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE). Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Nathan_Alleman/publication/322508933_A_Private_Struggle_at_a_Private_Institution_Effects_of_Student_Hunger_on_Social_and_Academic_Experiences/links/5a5d0415a6fdcc68fa96eeb0/A-Private-Struggle-at-a-Private-Institution-Effects-of-Student-Hunger-on-Social-and-Academic-Experiences.pdf;

Henry, L. (2017). Understanding food insecurity among college students: Experience, motivation, and local solutions. *Annals of Anthropological Practice*, 41(1), 6-19.; Ambrose, V. K. (2016) *It's like a mountain: The lived experience of homeless college students*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Tennessee Knoxville. Retrieved from http://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_graddiss/3887;

Tierney, W. G., Gupton, J. T., & Hallett, R. E. (2008). *Transitions to adulthood for homeless adolescents: Education and public policy*. USC Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis. Retrieved from https://pullias.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/2008_CHEPA_Transitions_to_Adulthood_for_Homeless_Adolescents.pdf

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³⁰ Students Against Hunger, a program that provides free meals to students via their student ID cards, increased persistence and GPA's for recipients when compared to waitlisted students. Novak, H. & Johnson, J. J. (2016-17). Students against hunger: An approach to food insecurity at a large public land grant university. *Journal of Student Affairs*, Vol. XXVI, 99-107. Several randomized controlled trials of basic needs supports are described in Goldrick-Rab, S., Broton, K. M., & Hernandez, D. C. (2017).

³¹ There are three exceptions. Both the San Diego Community College District and George Washington University chose to send invitations to random samples of 3,000 students, and the University of Massachusetts Boston erroneously sent the initial survey invitation to both graduate and undergraduate students. The UMass Boston sample includes 209 students, and likely a small minority are graduate students, although there is no way to differentiate them.

³² Gold standard survey methodology necessary for creating the most rigorous measures requires large, monetary participation incentives, stratified random sampling, and mail and phone administration. Surveys meeting these criteria are typically funded by the federal government. Food and housing insecurity measures are likely to be included in the 2020 administration of the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, although the results to that survey will not be available until late 2021.

³³ United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. (2012). *U.S. adult food security survey module: Three-stage design, with screeners*. Retrieved from <https://www.ers.usda.gov/media/8279/ad2012.pdf>

³⁴ See Crutchfield and Maguire (2018).

³⁵ Measurements of basic needs insecurities may vary over a semester, although the direction and magnitude of these variations are unknown. Although early semester measurements can capture students before they drop out, later semester measurements often occur after students have spent their financial aid and, as a result, face food and housing difficulties. Breuning et al. (2018) measure the same population at the beginning and end of a semester, and find slightly higher rates of food insecurity at the end (35%) than at the beginning (28%).

³⁶ The sample is consistent with research showing generally higher survey response rates for females than males. See Scheaffer, R., Mendenhall, E., Ott, L., & Gerow, K. (2012). *Elementary survey sampling*. Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.

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³⁸ See Toro, P.A., Dworsky, A., & Fowler, P. J. (2007). *Homeless youth in the United States: Recent research findings and intervention approaches*. Paper presented at the 2007 National Symposium on Homelessness Research. Retrieved from https://www.huduser.gov/publications/pdf/homeless_symp_07.pdf#page=231

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⁴¹ Kneebone, E. (2009). *Economic recovery and the EITC: Expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit to benefit families and places*. Brookings Institution. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/research/economic-recovery-and-the-eitc-expanding-the-earned-income-tax-credit-to-benefit-families-and-places/>

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