



MARCH 2019

California Community Colleges #RealCollege Survey

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California
Community
Colleges





Executive Summary

The #RealCollege survey is the nation's largest annual assessment of basic needs security among college students. The survey, which specifically evaluates access to affordable food and housing, began in 2015 under the Wisconsin HOPE Lab. This report describes the results of the #RealCollege survey administered at nearly half of the schools in the California Community College system in the fall of 2016 and 2018.

Rates of basic needs insecurity vary by region and by institution. The highest incidence of basic needs insecurity is found in the Northern Coastal, Northern Inland, and Greater Sacramento regions of California. In contrast, rates of basic needs insecurity are far lower, albeit still substantial, in the South Central region of the state, which includes Santa Barbara. Rates of basic needs insecurity are higher for marginalized students, including African Americans, students identifying as LGBTQ, and students considered independent from their parents or guardians for financial aid purposes. Students who have served in the military, former foster youth, and formerly incarcerated students are all at greater risk of basic needs insecurity. Working during college is not associated with a lower risk of basic needs insecurity, and neither is receiving the federal Pell Grant; the latter is associated with higher rates of basic needs insecurity.

If your institution is interested in participating in a 2019 survey of basic needs, please contact the Hope Center Research Team at hopesrvy@temple.edu.

ALMOST 40,000 STUDENTS AT 57 CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES PARTICIPATED. THE RESULTS INDICATE:

- 50% of respondents were food insecure in the prior 30 days,
- 60% of respondents were housing insecure in the previous year,
- 19% of respondents were homeless in the previous year.

The Hope Center thanks the California State Legislature, California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office & The Institute for College Access and Success for making this report possible.

Introduction

According to the federal government, insufficient food and housing undermines postsecondary educational experiences and credential attainment for many of today's college students.¹ Data describing the scope and dimensions of this problem, particularly at the college level, remain sparse. The #RealCollege survey fills a void by providing needed information for campus leaders and policymakers who are seeking to support students better. A 2019 U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report noted that there are only 31 quality studies of campus food insecurity, very few of which involve multiple colleges. Among existing multi-institutional studies, four draw on data from the #RealCollege survey.

California faces many opportunities and challenges with an expanding and increasingly diverse population seeking college certificates and degrees. Surveys conducted in both the University of California and the California State University systems document the prevalence of basic needs insecurity among students in public four-year institutions.² There is also some evidence of these challenges among community college students.³ But until now, California Community Colleges lacked a robust multi-institutional survey capable of revealing the scope and scale of the challenge confronting its 114 open-access institutions.

Colleges seek to address students' basic needs because food and housing insecurity undermines academic success.⁴ Housing insecurity and homelessness have a particularly strong, statistically significant relationship with college completion rates, persistence, and credit attainment.⁵ Researchers also associate basic needs insecurity with self-reports of poor physical health, symptoms of depression, and higher perceived stress.⁶

While campus food pantries are increasingly common, usage of other supports to promote economic security are not. In particular, use of public benefits programs remains low among





students in higher education, with many students missing out on the opportunity to receive SNAP (CalFresh in California).⁷ The GAO estimates that 57% of students at risk of food insecurity and eligible for SNAP did not collect those benefits. A 2016 study of students at a California state university found that 80% of students who were eligible for CalFresh did not receive benefits.⁸

Designing effective practices and policies requires understanding how students experience and cope with basic needs insecurity. To inform this work in California community colleges, this report includes overall and subgroup estimates of food and housing insecurity, as well as contextual information.

REPORT OVERVIEW

The following report presents findings from the Hope Center's 2016 and 2018 #RealCollege surveys on basic needs of students at 57 California community colleges.⁹ **Section 1** of this report describes the overall rates of basic needs insecurity across all survey respondents, as well as variation in these rates across schools and regions. **Section 2** describes rates of basic needs by specific groups of students. **Section 3** describes the work and academic experiences of students with basic needs insecurity. **Section 4** describes utilization of public assistance by students who need support.

For more on the research methodology and additional tables please refer to the online Appendix, which appears under the main report on the Hope Center's website:

hope4college.com/reports

SECTION 1:

Prevalence of Basic Needs Insecurity

What fraction of students are affected by basic needs insecurity? This section examines the prevalence of food insecurity during the month prior to the survey, and the prevalence of housing insecurity and homelessness during the previous year.

The data in this report come from an electronic survey fielded to students. This system-wide report includes data from 57 schools in the system. Colleges distributed the electronic survey to all enrolled students, yielding an estimated response rate of 5%, resulting in almost 40,000 total students participating in the survey.

FOOD INSECURITY

Food insecurity is the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe food, or the ability to acquire such food in a socially acceptable manner. The most extreme form is often accompanied with physiological sensations of hunger. We assessed food security among California community college students using the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) 18-item set of questions.¹⁰

During the 30 days preceding the survey, 50% of the California community college students who responded to the survey experienced food insecurity, with 20% assessed at the low level and 30% assessed at the very lowest level of food security (Figure 1).

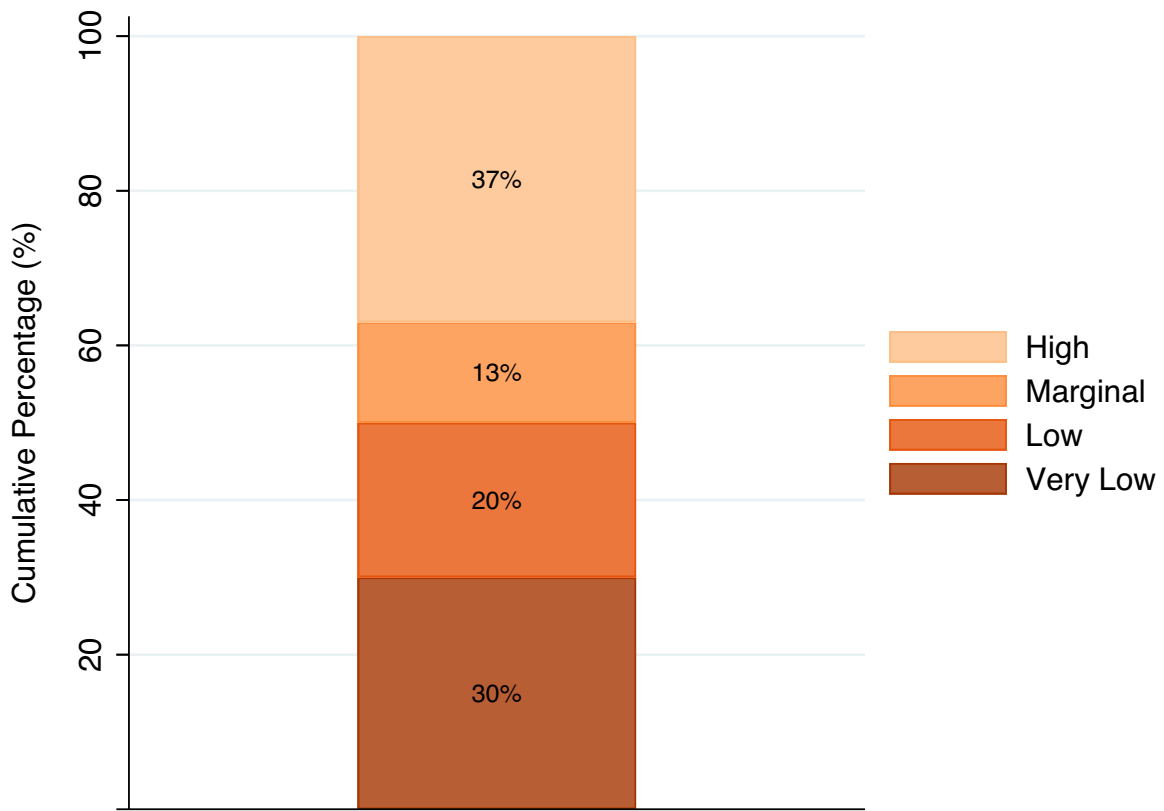
Over half of survey respondents worried about running out of food or could not afford to eat balanced meals (Figure 2). Forty-one percent of respondents reported that they skipped meals or cut the size of their meals for financial reasons, and 12% of respondents reported not eating for at least one whole day during the prior month because they didn't have enough money.

WHO ANSWERED THE SURVEY?

Most students sent the #RealCollege survey did not answer it. We surveyed all students rather than drawing a subsample due to legal and financial restrictions. The results may be biased — overstating or understating the problem— depending on who answered and who did not. As readers ponder this issue, consider that the survey was emailed to students and thus they had to have electronic access to respond. The incentives provided were negligible and did not include help with their challenges. Finally, the survey was framed as about college life, not about hunger or homelessness.



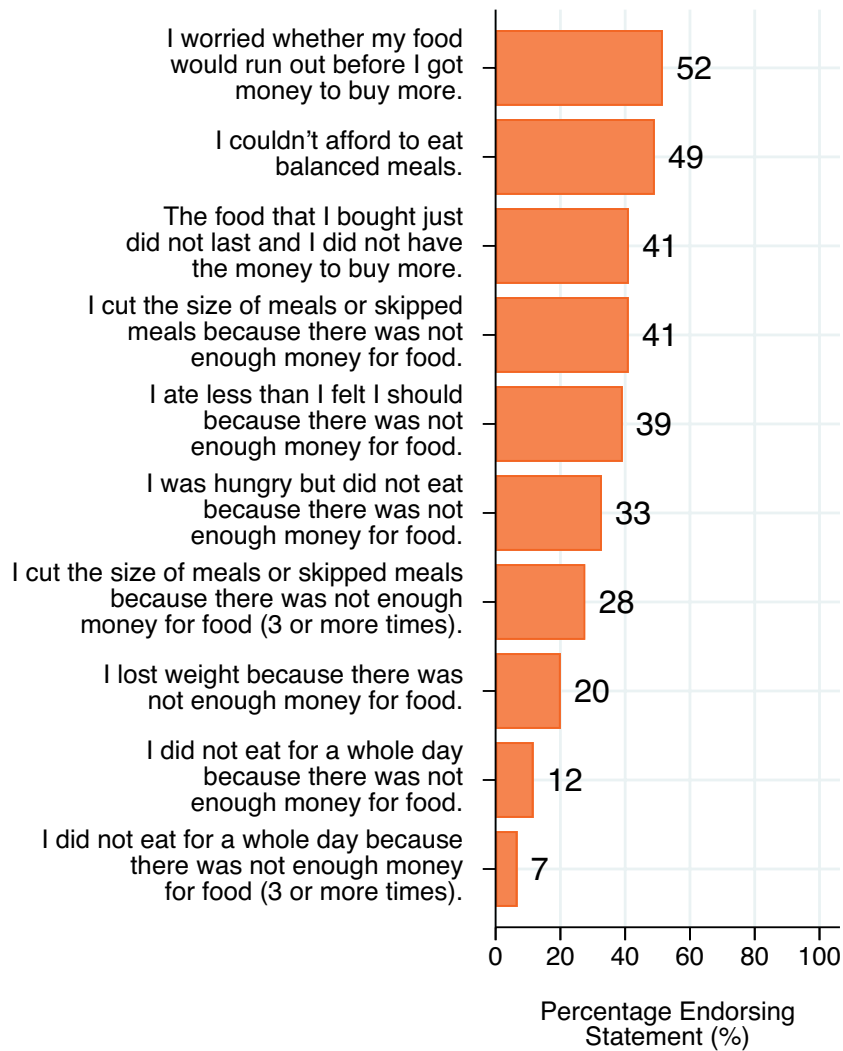
FIGURE 1. Food Security Among California Community College Survey Respondents



Source: 2016 & 2018 #RealCollege Surveys

Notes: According to the USDA, students at either the low or very low level of food security are termed “food insecure.” For more details on the 2016 and 2018 food security measures used in this report, see Appendix C.

FIGURE 2. Food Insecurity Among California Community College Survey Respondents



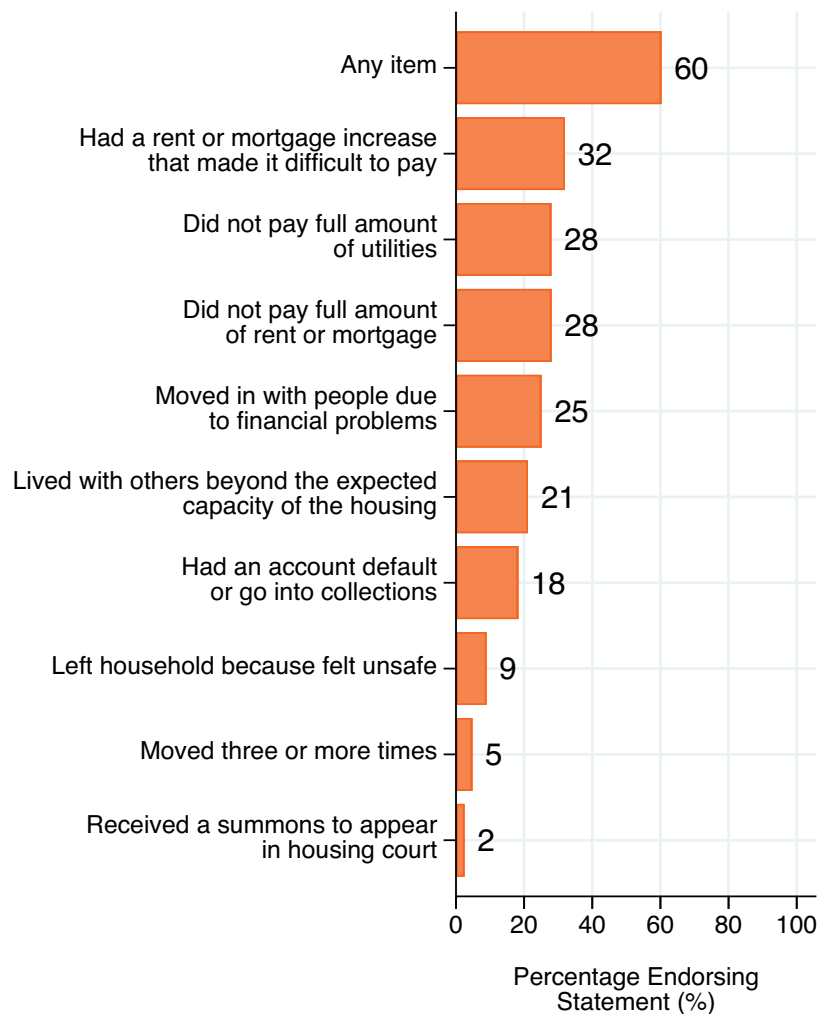
Source: 2018 #RealCollege Survey

HOUSING INSECURITY AND HOMELESSNESS

Housing insecurity includes a broad 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 results suggest that they are more likely to suffer some form of housing insecurity than to have all their needs met during college. Housing insecurity among students was assessed with a nine-item set of questions developed by the Hope Center.

Sixty percent of survey respondents experienced housing insecurity in the previous year (Figure 3). The most commonly reported challenges were experiencing a rent or mortgage increase (32%), not paying the full cost of utilities (28%), and not paying the full amount of their rent or mortgage (28%).

FIGURE 3. Housing Insecurity Among California Community College Survey Respondents

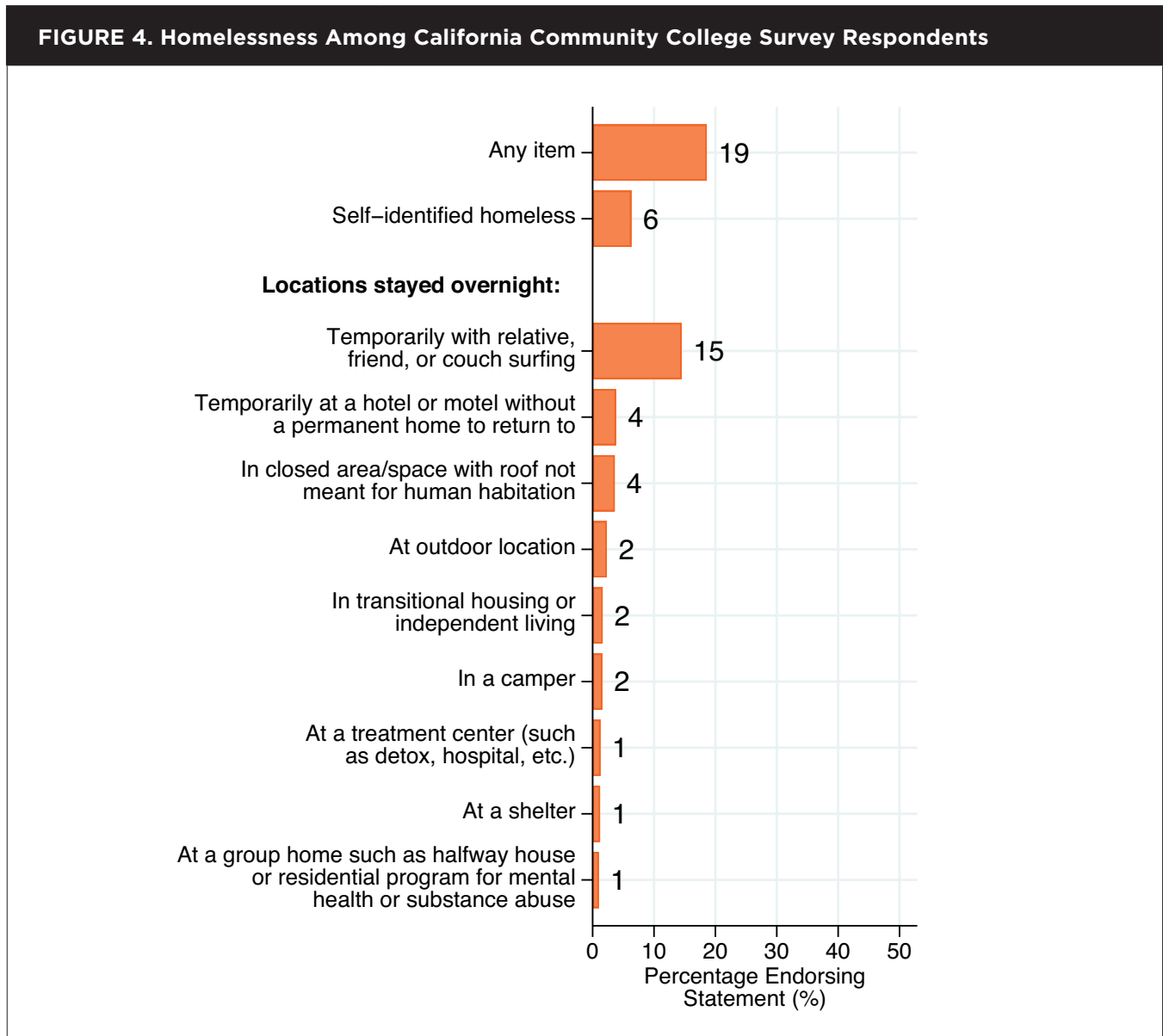


Source: Top bar – 2016 & 2018 #RealCollege Surveys; All other bars – 2018 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: In the above graph, the top bar, “Any item” represents the rate of housing insecurity for all California community college survey respondents in 2016 and 2018. However, housing insecurity was measured differently in 2016. For more details on the 2016 and 2018 measures of housing insecurity used in this report, see Appendix C.

Homelessness means that a person does not have a stable place to live. Students were identified as homeless if they responded affirmatively to a question asking if they had been homeless or they identified living conditions that are considered signs of homelessness. We measure homelessness with a tool developed by California State University researchers.

Homelessness affected 19% of California community college survey respondents during the previous year (Figure 4). Six percent of those respondents self-identify as homeless; 13% experience homelessness (e.g. were living under conditions indicating housing insecurity), but do not self-identify as homeless. The vast majority of students who experience homelessness temporarily stayed with a relative or friend, or couch surfed.



Source: Top bar - 2016 & 2018 #RealCollege Surveys; All other bars - 2018 #RealCollege Survey

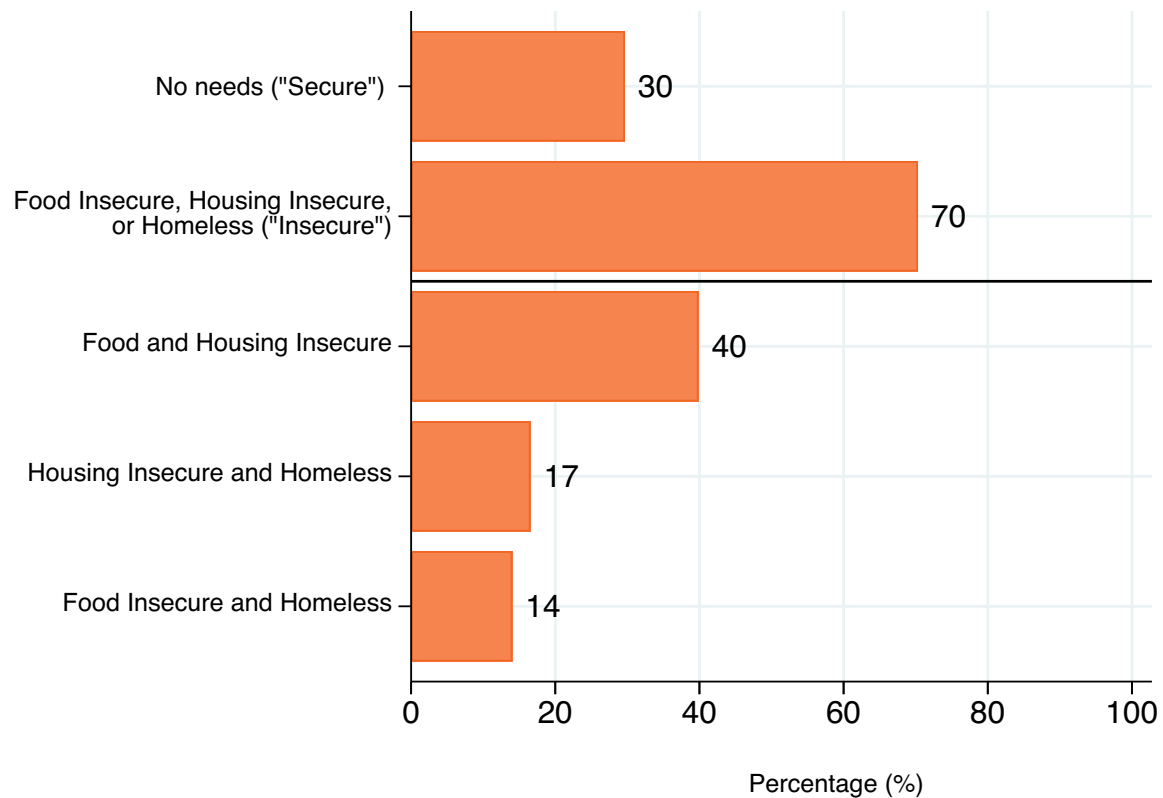
Notes: In the above graph, the top bar, "Any item" represents the rate of homelessness for all California community college survey respondents in 2016 and 2018. However, homelessness was measured differently in 2016. For more details on the 2016 and 2018 measures of homelessness used in this report, see Appendix C.

OVERLAPPING CHALLENGES

Students who lack resources for housing often also lack resources for food. In addition, basic needs insecurity varies over time, such that a student might experience housing insecurity during one semester and food insecurity the next. Some students are housing insecure during the summer and homeless during the winter.

Seven in 10 students responding to the survey experienced food insecurity *or* housing insecurity *or* homelessness during the previous year (Figure 5). In addition, 40% of respondents were both food and housing insecure in the past year, and 17% experienced both housing insecurity and homelessness during that time. Many of the latter group were also food insecure. Finally, 14% were both food insecure and homeless in the past year.

FIGURE 5. Intersections of Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity, and Homelessness Among California Community College Survey Respondents



Source: 2016 & 2018 #RealCollege Surveys

Notes: Food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness were measured differently in 2016. For more details on the 2016 and 2018 measures of basic needs insecurity used in this report, see Appendix C.

FIGURE 6. Regions of the California Community Colleges System



VARIATION BY REGION

Food insecurity in California community colleges ranges from 38% to 59% across regions (Figure 6 and Table 1). Housing insecurity varies from 49% to 70%. Homelessness varies the least by region, from approximately 15% to 24%. Region A, which includes much of northern California, has the highest rates of basic needs insecurity, while regions D and F, located on the south central coast and southeastern border, have substantially lower, albeit still substantial, rates of basic needs insecurity.

TABLE 1. Rates of Basic Needs Insecurity by Region*

| | Number of Students | Food Insecurity (%) | Housing Insecurity (%) | Homelessness (%) |
|------------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| BY REGION | | | | |
| A | 1,093 | 59 | 70 | 24 |
| B | 7,991 | 43 | 59 | 20 |
| C | 3,669 | 53 | 64 | 18 |
| D | 762 | 38 | 49 | 16 |
| E | 3,959 | 50 | 60 | 18 |
| F | 1,952 | 45 | 58 | 15 |
| G | 12,830 | 54 | 60 | 18 |
| TOTAL | 32,256 | | | |

*Among California Community College Survey Respondents

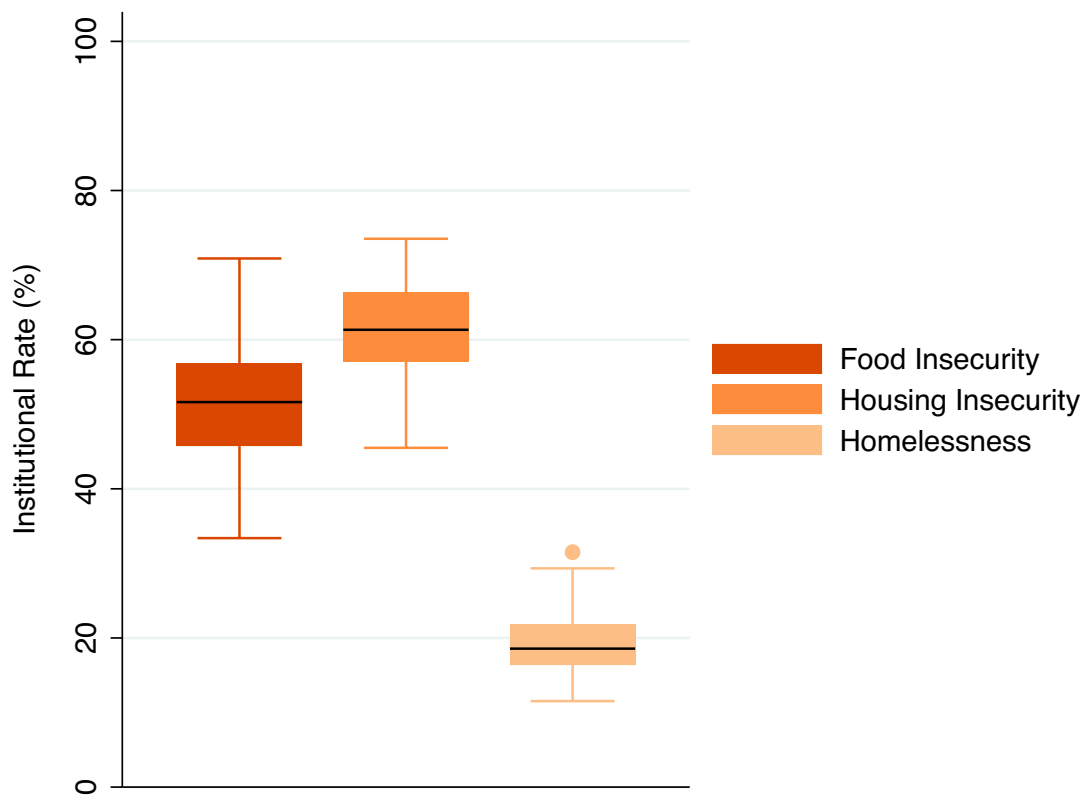
Source: 2016 & 2018 #RealCollege Surveys

Notes: There were 32,256 survey participants across the regions in our measure of homelessness. The number of survey respondents for our measures of food insecurity and housing insecurity may vary slightly. For more detail on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, see Appendix C. Region A comprises the greater Sacramento and northern coastal and inland areas. Region B comprises East Bay, Mid-Peninsula, North Bay, Santa Cruz/Monterey, and Silicon Valley areas. Region C comprises Central Valley and Mother Lode regions. Region D comprises the South Central area. Region E comprises the San Diego/Imperial areas. Region F comprises Inland Empire and Desert areas. Region G comprises Los Angeles and Orange County.

VARIATION BY INSTITUTION

Within and across regions, institutional rates of basic needs insecurity vary as well (Figure 7). There is wide variation in rates of food insecurity across institutions, from around 35% at one institution to almost 70% at another. Rates of housing insecurity have a slightly smaller range across participating institutions, with few colleges having less than 50% of their students experiencing housing insecurity and the highest rates slightly less than 75%. Rates of student homelessness range from approximately 10% to 30%, with most participating institutions ranging from 15% to 20%.

FIGURE 7. Variation in Institutional Rates of Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity, & Homelessness Among California Community College Survey Respondents



Source: 2016 & 2018 #RealCollege Surveys

Notes: The horizontal line within each box represents the median institutional rate. Food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness were measured differently across years. For more details on the 2016 and 2018 measures of basic needs insecurity used in this report, see Appendix C. Institutional-level rates were not available for institutions in the San Diego Community College District or the San Mateo Community College District; however, district-level rates for these two districts are used in compiling the figure above.

SECTION 2:

Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurity

Some California community college students are at higher risk of basic needs insecurity than others. This section of the report examines basic needs insecurity according to students' demographic, academic, and economic characteristics, as well as their life circumstances.

DEMOGRAPHIC DISPARITIES IN BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY

Students who are male or heterosexual have lower rates of basic needs insecurity as compared to their peers; students who are not sure of their sexuality or do not identify as heterosexual, gay, lesbian, or bisexual also have lower rates than their peers (Table 2). Students who chose not to identify themselves as female, male, or transgender have higher rates of food and housing insecurity as compared to other gender orientations. Transgender students have the highest rates of homelessness at 37%, approximately double the rate of students identifying as male or female. Bisexual students have rates of food insecurity 11 percentage points higher than their heterosexual peers, at 58% versus 47%. Gay or lesbian students have food insecurity rates almost as high, at 56%. These students have rates of housing insecurity and homelessness almost 10 percentage points higher than their heterosexual or non-identifying peers.



There are also sizable racial/ethnic disparities in basic needs insecurity among California community college students. For example, rates of food insecurity among students identifying as African American or Black, American Indian, or Alaskan Native exceed 60%. This is approximately 10 percentage points higher than rates for Hispanic or Latinx students, and almost 20 percentage points higher than rates for students identifying as White or Caucasian. Racial/ethnic disparities are somewhat smaller, but still pronounced, for housing insecurity and homelessness. Students who are not U.S. citizens are somewhat more likely than U.S. citizens to experience homelessness, but the converse is true with regard to food insecurity.

Higher levels of parental education are associated with less risk of basic needs insecurity, with the clearest disparities evident based on whether or not a student's parent possesses a bachelor's degree. Nonetheless, about one-third of students with college-educated parents experience food insecurity.

Basic needs insecurity is more pronounced among older California community college students. For example, more than half of students ages 21 or older experience food insecurity (compared to 40% for 18–20 year olds) and about one in five experience homelessness (compared to 15% for 18–20 year olds).

TABLE 2. Demographic Disparities in Rates of Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity, and Homelessness*

| | Number of Students | Food Insecurity (%) | Housing Insecurity (%) | Homelessness (%) |
|--|--------------------|---------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| GENDER ORIENTATION | | | | |
| Male | 7,375 | 44 | 56 | 21 |
| Female | 18,024 | 50 | 64 | 18 |
| Transgender | 245 | 56 | 65 | 37 |
| Does not identify as female, male, or transgender | 490 | 59 | 70 | 33 |
| SEXUAL ORIENTATION | | | | |
| Heterosexual or straight | 20,605 | 47 | 61 | 18 |
| Gay or lesbian | 969 | 56 | 68 | 27 |
| Bisexual | 2,316 | 58 | 67 | 25 |
| Is not sure or neither heterosexual, gay, lesbian, or bisexual | 1,437 | 50 | 61 | 19 |
| RACIAL OR ETHNIC BACKGROUND | | | | |
| White or Caucasian | 7,409 | 45 | 59 | 21 |
| African American or Black | 1,874 | 62 | 73 | 31 |
| Hispanic or Latinx | 11,713 | 51 | 65 | 17 |
| American Indian or Alaskan Native | 656 | 63 | 74 | 32 |
| Middle Eastern or North African or Arab or Arab American | 521 | 44 | 62 | 21 |
| Southeast Asian | 1,799 | 41 | 52 | 17 |
| Pacific Islander or native Hawaiian | 649 | 57 | 63 | 25 |
| Other Asian or Asian American | 2,800 | 39 | 50 | 16 |
| Other | 1,066 | 54 | 65 | 23 |
| STUDENT IS A U.S. CITIZEN OR PERMANENT RESIDENT | | | | |
| Yes | 23,331 | 49 | 62 | 19 |

TABLE 2. Demographic Disparities in Rates of Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity, and Homelessness* (continued)

| | Number of Students | Food Insecurity (%) | Housing Insecurity (%) | Homelessness (%) |
|--|---------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| No | 1,403 | 44 | 62 | 24 |
| Prefers not to answer | 795 | 49 | 64 | 17 |
| HIGHEST LEVEL OF PARENTAL EDUCATION | | | | |
| No high school diploma | 5,100 | 53 | 69 | 18 |
| High school diploma | 5,552 | 51 | 62 | 21 |
| Some college | 9,122 | 52 | 66 | 20 |
| Bachelor's degree or greater | 4,879 | 33 | 46 | 16 |
| Does not know | 1,046 | 49 | 61 | 22 |
| AGE | | | | |
| 18 to 20 | 9,519 | 40 | 46 | 15 |
| 21 to 25 | 6,909 | 53 | 68 | 23 |
| 26 to 30 | 3,525 | 58 | 78 | 24 |
| Older than 30 | 5,597 | 52 | 71 | 20 |

*Among California Community College Survey Respondents

Source: 2018 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: In the table above, the columns labelled Food, Housing, and Homelessness indicate rates of food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness for each subgroup. For more detail on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, see Appendix C. Classifications of gender orientation and racial/ethnic background are not mutually exclusive. Students could self-identify with multiple classifications.

BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY BY ACADEMIC, ECONOMIC, AND LIFE EXPERIENCES

Rates of basic needs insecurity vary as well by students' academic, economic, and life experiences (Table 3). Food insecurity and homelessness vary minimally across part- versus full-time academic status, though full-time students experience less housing insecurity than their part-time peers, at 59% versus 64%. Students who spend three or more years in college have higher rates of food and housing insecurity than students who spend fewer than two years in college. Half of students with one or more years of college are food insecure and nearly two-thirds are housing insecure. In comparison, approximately 43% of students still in their first year of college are food insecure and 52% are housing insecure. Rates of homelessness do not differ by number of years in college.

Students who are considered independent from their families for the purposes of filing a FAFSA are more likely to experience food insecurity, homelessness, and housing insecurity than those claimed as a dependent by their parents. We also find disparities in basic needs insecurity by financial need (measured using Pell Grant status). Pell Grant recipients experience greater basic needs insecurity in all three categories in comparison with students who do not receive the Pell.

In addition, students with children experience higher rates of food insecurity (55%) and housing insecurity (69%) as compared with those who do not have children; rates of homelessness vary far less. Students who are married or in a domestic partnership have lower rates of homelessness than their peers in other types of relationships. While the total number of students who report being divorced (564) is small, the rates of food insecurity (65%), housing insecurity (84%), and homelessness (27%) are worth noting, as these rates are higher than any other relationship category.

TABLE 3. Rates of Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity, and Homelessness by Student Life Experiences*

| | Number of Students | Food Insecurity (%) | Housing Insecurity (%) | Homelessness (%) |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| COLLEGE ENROLLMENT STATUS | | | | |
| Full-time (at least 12 credits) | 15,828 | 48 | 59 | 20 |
| Part-time (fewer than 12 credits) | 11,775 | 48 | 64 | 18 |
| YEARS IN COLLEGE | | | | |
| Less than 1 | 7,200 | 43 | 52 | 19 |
| 1 to 2 | 9,218 | 49 | 62 | 19 |
| 3 or more | 9,309 | 52 | 68 | 19 |
| DEPENDENCY STATUS | | | | |
| Dependent | 8,989 | 41 | 50 | 15 |
| Independent | 16,466 | 53 | 69 | 22 |

TABLE 3. Rates of Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity, and Homelessness by Student Life Experiences* (continued)

| | Number of Students | Food Insecurity (%) | Housing Insecurity (%) | Homelessness (%) |
|--|--------------------|---------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| STUDENT RECEIVES THE PELL GRANT | | | | |
| Yes | 11,116 | 57 | 69 | 22 |
| No | 16,607 | 42 | 56 | 17 |
| STUDENT HAS CHILDREN | | | | |
| Yes | 6,124 | 55 | 69 | 19 |
| No | 21,599 | 46 | 59 | 19 |
| RELATIONSHIP STATUS | | | | |
| Single | 13,732 | 47 | 58 | 20 |
| In a relationship | 7,640 | 52 | 66 | 20 |
| Married or domestic partnership | 3,610 | 42 | 65 | 13 |
| Divorced | 564 | 65 | 84 | 27 |
| Widowed | 116 | 54 | 67 | 25 |
| STUDENT HAS BEEN IN FOSTER CARE | | | | |
| Yes | 1,013 | 69 | 82 | 43 |
| No | 24,637 | 48 | 61 | 18 |
| STUDENT SERVED IN THE MILITARY | | | | |
| Yes | 749 | 48 | 64 | 25 |
| No | 24,909 | 48 | 62 | 19 |
| EMPLOYMENT STATUS | | | | |
| Employed | 15,359 | 52 | 68 | 20 |
| Not employed, looking for work | 5,274 | 51 | 58 | 21 |
| Not employed, not looking for work | 5,940 | 34 | 46 | 13 |
| STUDENT HAS BEEN CONVICTED OF A CRIME | | | | |
| Yes | 996 | 66 | 83 | 44 |
| No | 25,608 | 47 | 61 | 18 |

TABLE 3. Rates of Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity, and Homelessness by Student Life Experiences* (continued)

| | Number of Students | Food Insecurity (%) | Housing Insecurity (%) | Homelessness (%) |
|---|---------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| DISABILITY OR MEDICAL CONDITION | | | | |
| Learning disability (dyslexia, etc.) | 2,095 | 62 | 72 | 30 |
| Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) | 1,992 | 63 | 73 | 32 |
| Autism spectrum disorder | 343 | 49 | 54 | 31 |
| Physical disability (speech, sight, mobility, hearing, etc.) | 1,538 | 61 | 70 | 30 |
| Chronic illness (asthma, diabetes, autoimmune disorder, cancer, etc.) | 3,170 | 58 | 71 | 26 |
| Psychological disorder (depression, anxiety, etc.) | 7,732 | 60 | 71 | 27 |
| Other | 711 | 61 | 71 | 29 |
| No disability or medical condition | 14,619 | 42 | 57 | 15 |

*Among California Community College Survey Respondents

Source: 2018 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: For more detail on how each measure of insecurity was constructed see Appendix C. Classifications of disability or medical conditions are not mutually exclusive. Students could self-identify with multiple disabilities or medical conditions.

DISPARITIES BY LIFE CIRCUMSTANCES

Table 3 also illustrates variations in basic needs insecurity by student life circumstances. Students who have been in the foster care system are much more likely to report basic needs insecurity than their peers. More than two-thirds of these students experience food insecurity, while the vast majority (82%) experience housing insecurity. Forty-three percent of students who were formerly in foster care also experience homelessness.

Students who served in the military were more likely to experience homelessness (25%) than students who did not (19%). However, students with military experience were no more likely to experience food insecurity than students who were not in the military.

Within employment categories, students who were looking for work have lower basic needs insecurity than their peers. Students who were employed or looking for work experience similar rates of food insecurity and homelessness. However, employed students experience higher rates of housing insecurity (68%) than students who were looking for work (58%). For more detailed information about employment and basic needs insecurity, refer to Section 3.

Among students who reported they had been convicted of a crime in the past, many encounter food and housing challenges while attending college. Two-thirds of these respondents experience food insecurity, while 83% experience housing insecurity. Also, a significant share of these students (44%) experience homelessness.

Basic needs insecurity varies widely by disability or medical condition. Students who reported having attention deficit hyperactivity disorder struggle the most with basic needs insecurity, while students with autism spectrum disorder report rates of housing insecurity below the rates for students who reported not having a disability or medical condition.



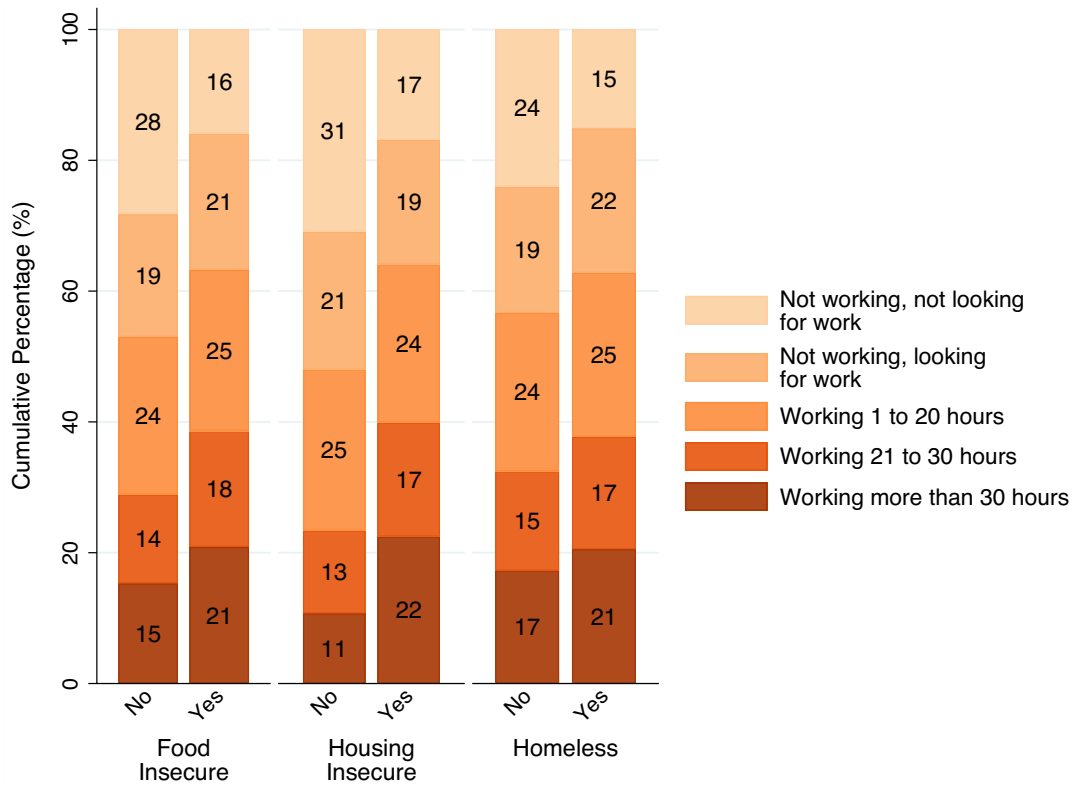


SECTION 3:

Employment and Academic Performance

Like most American undergraduates, California community college students experiencing basic needs insecurity are overwhelmingly part of the labor force. For example, the vast majority (84%) of students who experience food insecurity are employed or looking for work (Figure 8). Similarly, the majority of students who experience housing insecurity or homelessness are employed or looking for work. Also, among working students, those who experience basic needs insecurity work more hours than other students.

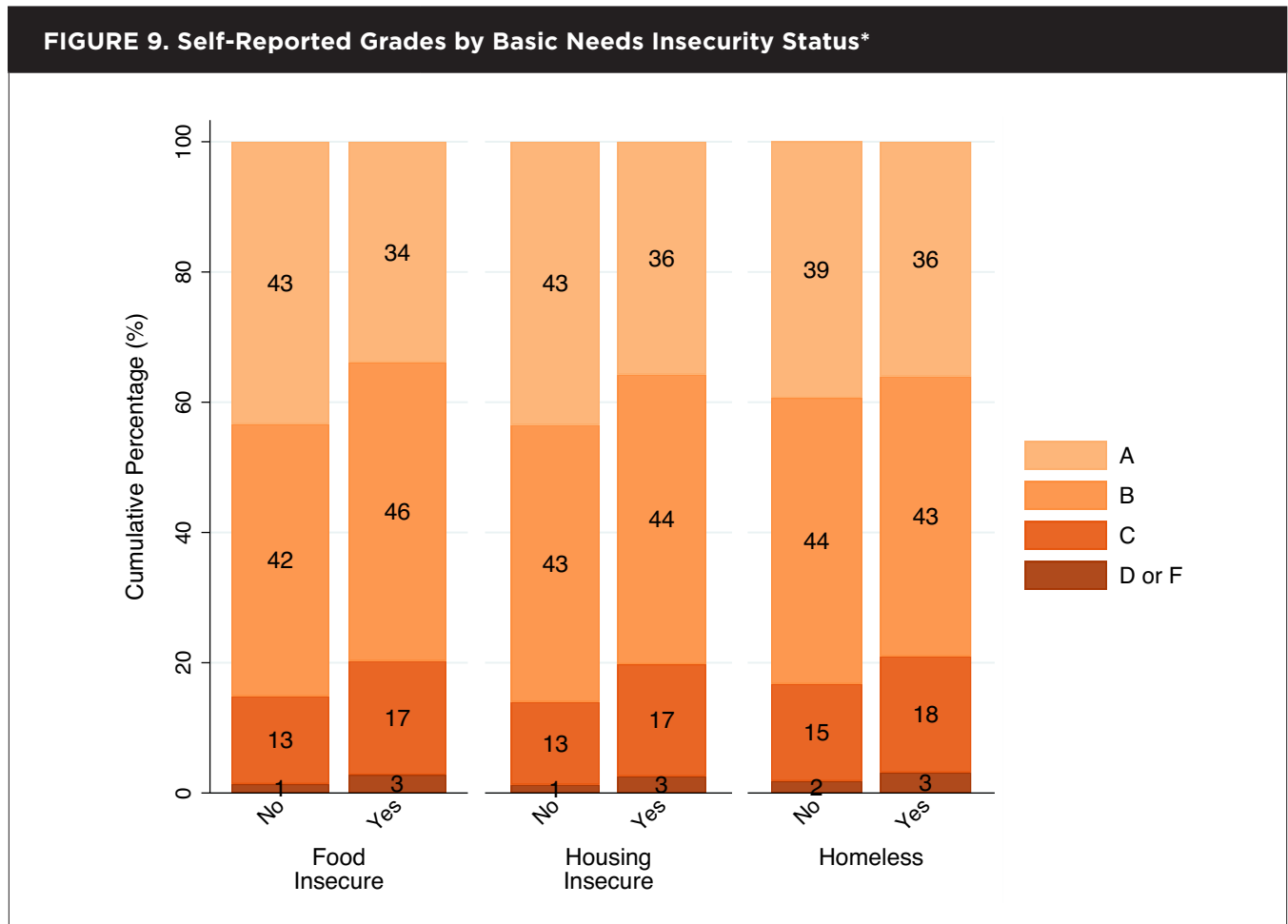
FIGURE 8. Employment Behavior by Basic Needs Insecurity Status*



*Among California Community College Survey Respondents

Source: 2018 #RealCollege Survey

Figure 9 illustrates that while most students report receiving A's and B's, students who experience food insecurity report grades of C or below at higher rates than students who do not experience food insecurity. Similarly, about one in five students who experience housing insecurity or homelessness earn grades of C or below.



*Among California Community College Survey Respondents

Source: 2018 #RealCollege Survey

SECTION 4:

Utilization of Supports

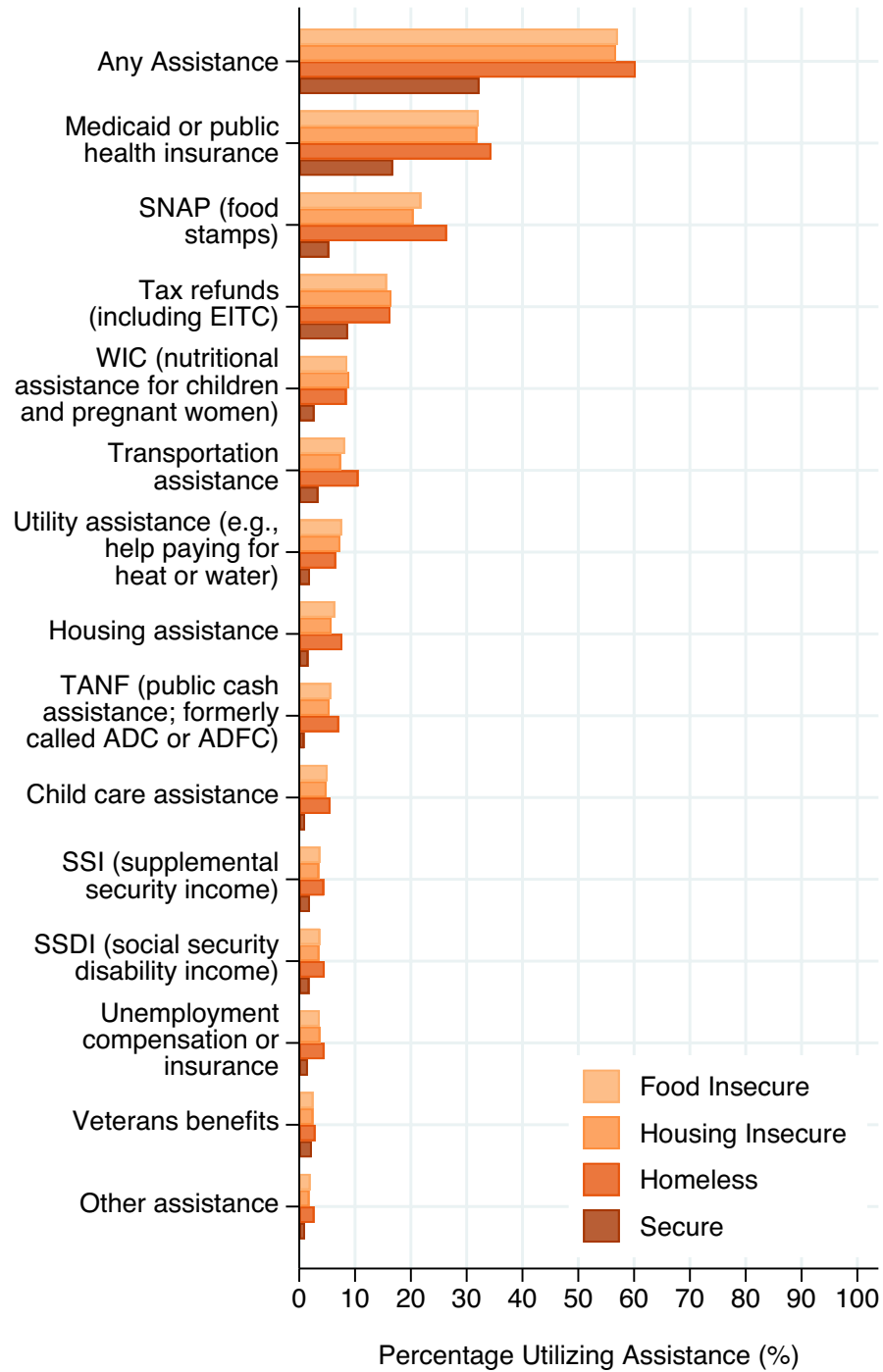
Many students in California community colleges who experience basic needs insecurity do not receive public assistance (Figure 10). Approximately 22% of food insecure students receive SNAP. Likewise, only 8% of students who experience homelessness receive housing assistance. Medicaid or public health insurance, SNAP, and tax refunds are the supports used most often, though they remain quite low given the rates of students experiencing basic needs insecurity. It is also worth noting that students who are secure in their basic needs are still accessing public benefits, albeit at lower rates (32%) than students with food insecurity (57%), housing insecurity (57%), and homelessness (60%).¹¹

Use of public assistance also varies by California region (Table 4). Moreover, the use of public assistance reflects the variation in basic needs insecurity by region (Table 1). For example, Region A, which has the highest incidence of basic needs insecurity, also sees the highest utilization of public assistance. In contrast, regions D and B, areas with relatively lower rates of basic needs insecurity, see fewer students accessing supports.

California Community College students deserve more support for their basic needs. The Hope Center and the Institute for College Access and Success offer policy recommendations in a brief found on the Hope Center website.



FIGURE 10. Use of Assistance Among California Community College Survey Respondents According to Basic Needs Security



Source: 2018 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: For more detail on the percentages for each bar, see Appendix E, Table E-10.

TABLE 4. Utilization of Public Assistance by California Region*

| | REGION | | | | | | |
|--|--------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| | A | B | C | D | E | F | G |
| PERCENTAGE USING: | | | | | | | |
| Any Assistance | 59 | 43 | 58 | 38 | 47 | 48 | 49 |
| Medicaid or public health insurance | 35 | 23 | 35 | 19 | 24 | 28 | 27 |
| SNAP (food stamps) | 25 | 10 | 26 | 7 | 12 | 17 | 15 |
| Tax refunds (including EITC) | 17 | 13 | 14 | 13 | 13 | 14 | 14 |
| WIC (nutritional assistance for children and pregnant women) | 7 | 4 | 13 | 1 | 6 | 8 | 7 |
| Transportation assistance | 7 | 6 | 7 | 2 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Utility assistance (e.g., help paying for heat or water) | 10 | 4 | 7 | 3 | 7 | 6 | 5 |
| Housing assistance | 6 | 5 | 6 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 4 |
| TANF (public cash assistance; formerly called ADC or ADCF) | 4 | 2 | 8 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 4 |
| Child care assistance | 5 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 3 |
| SSI (supplemental security income) | 6 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| SSDI (social security disability income) | 6 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Unemployment compensation or insurance | 4 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| Veterans benefits | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 2 |
| Other assistance | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 |

* Among California Community College Survey Respondents

Source: 2018#RealCollege Survey

Notes: Region A comprises the greater Sacramento and northern coastal and inland areas. Region B comprises East Bay, Mid-Peninsula, North Bay, Santa Cruz/Monterey, and Silicon Valley areas. Region C comprises Central Valley and Mother Lode regions. Region D comprises the South Central area. Region E comprises the San Diego/Imperial areas. Region F comprises Inland Empire and Desert areas. Region G comprises Los Angeles and Orange County.

Authors

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Sara Goldrick-Rab is a Professor of Higher Education Policy and Sociology at Temple University, Founder of the Wisconsin HOPE Lab, and Founder of the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice (launched September 2018). She is best known for her innovative research on food and housing insecurity in higher education. She is the recipient of the William T. Grant Foundation's Faculty Scholars Award, and the American Educational Research Association's Early Career Award, and in 2016 POLITICO magazine named her one of the top 50 people shaping American politics. Her latest book, *Paying the Price: College Costs, Financial Aid, and the Betrayal of the American Dream* is a 2018 winner of the Grawemeyer Award. Dr. Goldrick-Rab is ranked 6th in the nation among education scholars according to *Education Week*.

CHRISTINE BAKER-SMITH

Christine Baker-Smith is the Managing Director and Director of Research for the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice. A sociologist of education, Christine's training is in mixed-methods research and causal inference with a focus on student social and academic engagement across schooling transitions. She holds a PhD from New York University in Sociology of Education, an EdM in Leadership, Policy and Politics from Teachers College, Columbia University, an MA in Social Sciences of Education from Stanford University, and a BA in Sociology from Whitman College. She has published on adolescence and school transitions in numerous peer-reviewed journals such as *Sociology of Education*, *Peabody Journal of Education*, and *Education Finance and Policy*.

VANESSA COCA

Vanessa Coca is a Senior Research Associate at the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice. She has more than a decade of experience in conducting research on the postsecondary enrollment and completion of students of color, students from low-income households, immigrant students, and first-generation college goers. Vanessa received her PhD in sociology of education at the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development at New York University—where she was an Institute of Education-funded Predoctoral Interdisciplinary Research Training (IES-PIRT) fellow. She also holds Bachelor's and Master's degrees from the University of Chicago.

ELIZABETH LOOKER

Elizabeth Looker is a Research Project Manager at the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice. Prior to joining the Hope Center, her experience was in academic affairs where she launched an EMBA program, managed graduate and undergraduate curricula, and advised students on coursework and careers in the MIT Sloan School of Management. Elizabeth earned an MEd in Higher Education Administration from Suffolk University and a BA in Sociology and Fine Art from Hampshire College.

Endnotes

- 1 U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2018). *Food insecurity: Better information could help eligible college students access federal food assistance benefits*. (GAO Publication No. 19-95) Washington, D.C.; U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2016). *Higher education: Actions needed to improve access to federal financial assistance for homeless and foster youth*. (GAO Publication No. 16-343) Washington, D.C.
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- 3 See Crutchfield et al. (2018); 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*. Madison, WI: Wisconsin HOPE Lab; Goldrick-Rab, S., Broton, K., & Eisenberg, D. (2015). *Hungry to learn: Addressing food & housing insecurity among undergraduates*. Madison, WI: Wisconsin HOPE Lab.
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- 6 For physical health, see Bruening, 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; Bruening, M., Argo, K., Payne-Sturges, D., & Laska, M. N. (2017). The struggle is real: A systematic review of food insecurity on postsecondary education campuses. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*; Freudenberg, N., Manzo, L., Jones, H., Kwan, A., Tsui, E., & Gagnon, M. (2011). *Food insecurity at CUNY: Results from a survey of CUNY undergraduate students*. New York: The Campaign for a Healthy CUNY, The City University of New York; McArthur, L. H., Ball, L., Danek, A. C., & Holbert, D. (2018). 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*, 50(6), 564-572; 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; Tsui, E., Freudenberg, N., Manzo, L., Jones, H., Kwan, A., & Gagnon, M. (2011). *Housing instability at CUNY: Results from a survey of CUNY undergraduate students*. New York: The Campaign for a Healthy CUNY, City University of New York; For symptoms of depression, see Bruening et al. (2018); Bruening et al. (2017); Payne-Sturges et al. (2017); Goldrick-Rab et al. (2015); Freudenberg et al. (2011). For higher perceived stress, see El Zein et al. (2017).
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9 To ensure we represent every California Community College institution that has participated in this survey, we include those schools that took the survey in 2016 where possible.

10 U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. (2012). *U.S. adult food security survey module: Three-stage design, with screeners*.

11 One of the many reasons students do not take advantage of available assistance is the social stigma that accompanies such aid. See King, J. A. (2017). Food insecurity among college students—Exploring the predictors of food assistance resource use (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Kent State University, Kent, Ohio; Allen, C. C., & Alleman, N. F. (2019). A private struggle at a private institution: Effects of student hunger on social and academic experiences. *Journal of College Student Development*, 60(1), 52–69; 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 student* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Tennessee—Knoxville, Knoxville, Tennessee; Tierney, W. G., Gupton, J. T., & Hallett, R. E. (2008). *Transitions to adulthood for homeless adolescents: Education and public policy*. Los Angeles: Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis, University of Southern California