



**MARCH 2019**

# **City University of New York #RealCollege Survey**

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## 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 in the fall of 2018 at all of the undergraduate campuses in the City University of New York (CUNY) system.

Rates of basic needs insecurity are higher for students attending CUNY's community colleges compared to those attending the senior colleges. They are also higher for marginalized students, including African Americans, students identifying as LGBTQ, and students who are independent from their parents or guardians for financial aid purposes. Students who have served in the military, former foster youth, and students who were formerly convicted of a crime 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 in fact 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](mailto:hopesrvy@temple.edu).***

### **ALMOST 22,000 STUDENTS AT 19 CAMPUSES PARTICIPATED. THE RESULTS INDICATE:**

- 48% of respondents were food insecure in the prior 30 days,
- 55% of respondents were housing insecure in the previous year,
- 14% of respondents were homeless in the previous year.

**The Hope Center thanks the Jewish Foundation for Education of Women (JFEW), Office of Institutional Research and Assessment at City University of New York, Dr. Nicholas Freudenberg, and Healthy CUNY for their support.**



# Introduction

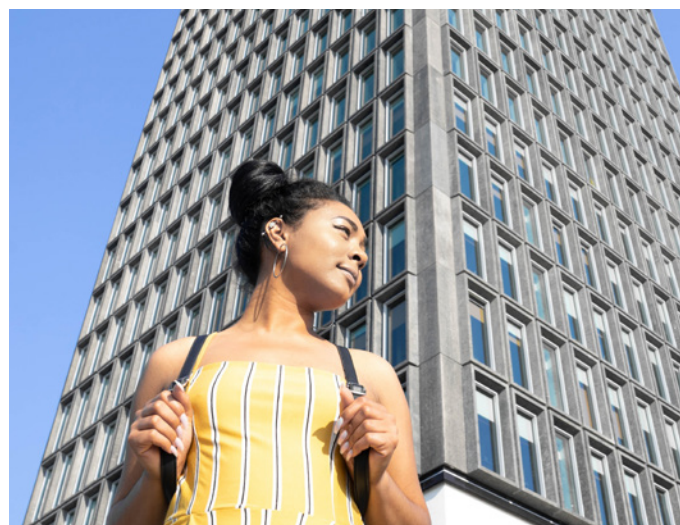
According to the federal government, insufficient food and housing undermines postsecondary educational experiences and credential attainment for many of today's college students.<sup>1</sup>

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.

Food and housing insecurity undermines academic success.<sup>2</sup> Housing insecurity and homelessness have a particularly strong, statistically significant relationship with college completion rates, persistence, and credit attainment.<sup>3</sup> Researchers also associate basic needs insecurity with self-reports of poor physical health, symptoms of depression, and higher perceived stress.<sup>4</sup>

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 (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, also called food stamps).<sup>5</sup> The GAO estimates that 57% of students at risk of food insecurity and eligible for SNAP did not collect those benefits.

New York City faces many opportunities and challenges with a large and diverse population seeking college certificates and degrees. At CUNY in particular, a recent study shows 53% of community college students and 37% of senior college students are living in households earning less than \$20,000 a year.<sup>6</sup> Over the last decade, Healthy CUNY has been working across the CUNY





campuses to address these concerns and support students with multiple efforts. They have engaged in multiple surveys to document the extent of the basic needs crisis at CUNY and have worked with service providers to improve access to benefits and support on CUNY campuses.<sup>7</sup> CUNY also offers the Single Stop program and emergency aid on campus, along with an array of other efforts.

Designing effective practices and policies that can address the challenges of food and housing insecurity at scale requires understanding how students experience and cope with basic needs insecurity. To inform this work at CUNY, 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 2018 #RealCollege survey on basic needs of students at 19 CUNY colleges. **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 colleges. **Section 2** describes rates of basic needs insecurity by specific groups of students. **Section 3** describes the work and academic experiences of students with basic needs insecurity. **Section 4** describes the utilization of public assistance by students who need support.

*For more on the research methodology and additional tables with information on survey participants, please refer to the appendices.*



## SECTION 1:

# Prevalence of Basic Needs Insecurity

What fraction of students at CUNY 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. For more detailed information about rates of basic needs insecurity by CUNY institutional type, please refer to Appendix E.

## 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 by physiological sensations of hunger. We assessed food security among CUNY students using the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) 18-item set of questions.<sup>8</sup>

During the 30 days preceding the survey, 48% of the CUNY students who responded to the survey experienced food insecurity, with 20% assessed at the low level and 28% at the very lowest level of food security (Figure 1). Rates of food insecurity are higher at community colleges compared to senior colleges (52% vs. 46%, Appendix E).

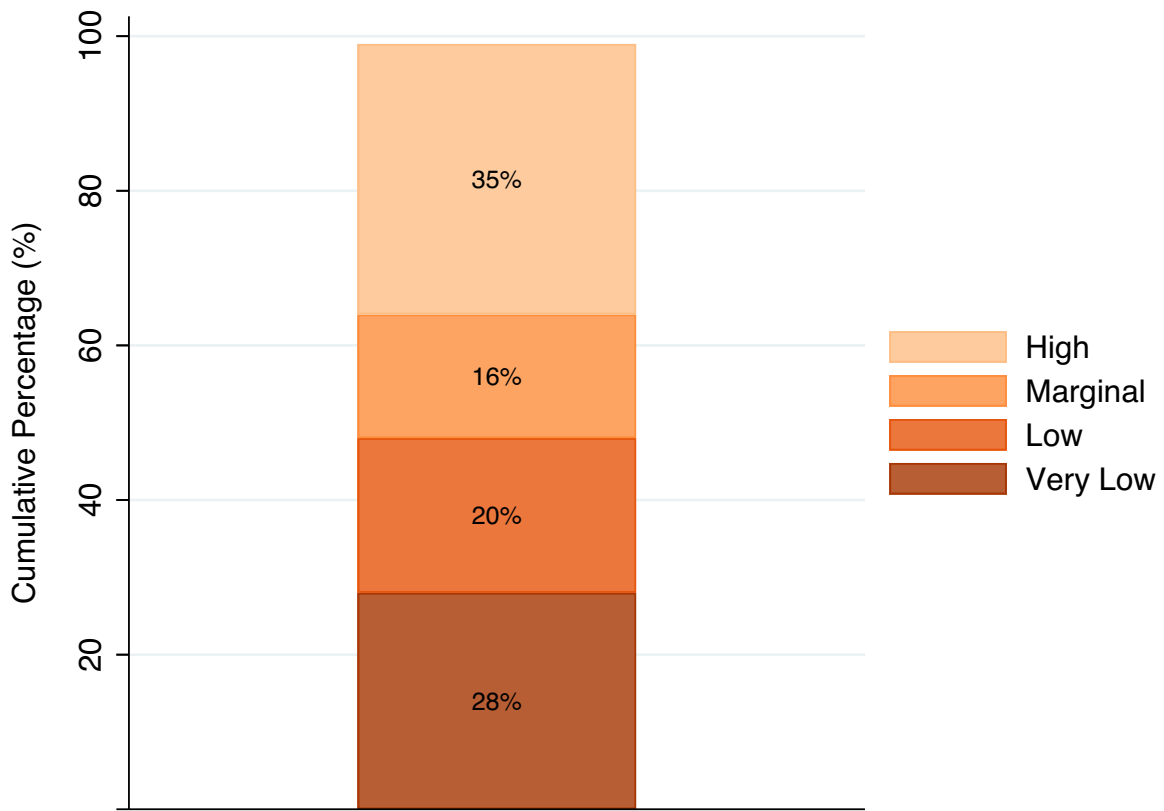
More than half of survey respondents worried about running out of food or could not afford to eat balanced meals (Figure 2). Forty percent of respondents said that they cut the size of their meals or skipped meals for financial reasons, and 11% reported not eating for at least one whole day during the prior month because they didn't have enough money.

## THE DATA

The data in this report come from an electronic survey fielded to students at CUNY colleges. This system-wide report includes data from all of CUNY's senior (n=11) and community colleges (n=7), as well as the CUNY School of Professional Studies. The electronic survey was distributed to all enrolled undergraduate students, yielding an estimated response rate of nearly 9%, or almost 22,000 student participants. For more information on how the survey was fielded and discussion of how representative the results are, please see the appendices. For information about how this survey's approach to assessing food insecurity compares to the approach used by Healthy CUNY, please see Appendix D.



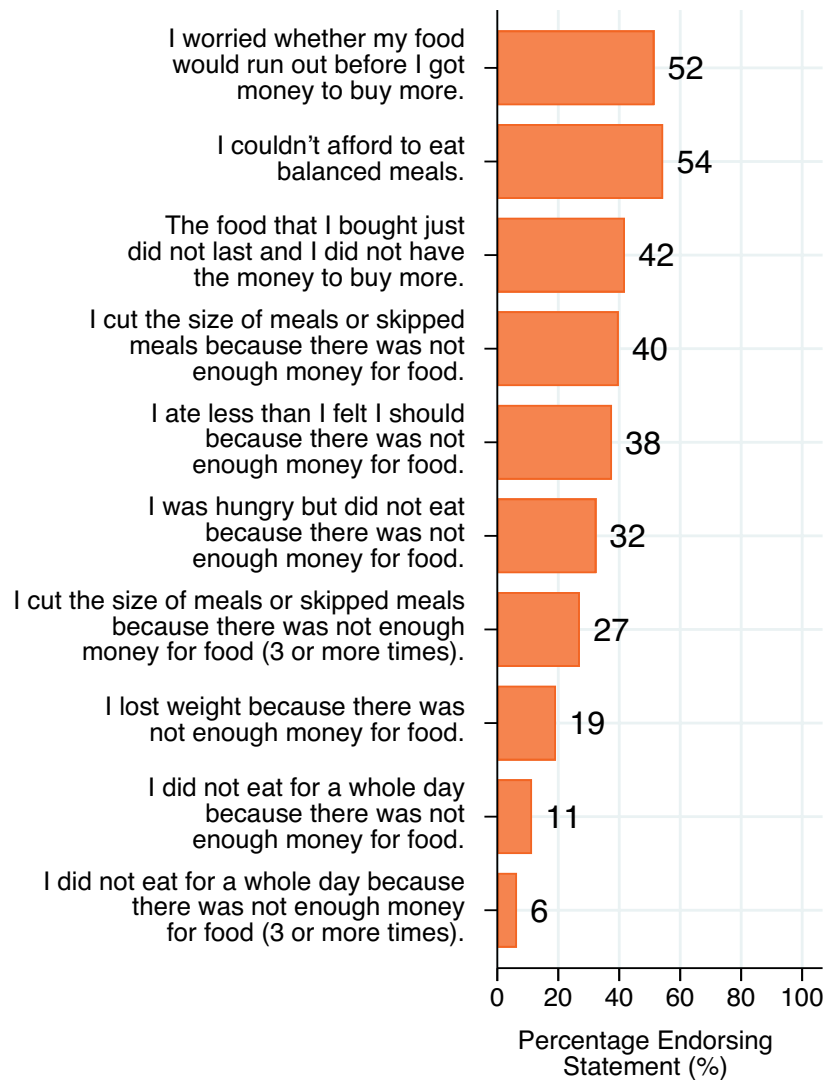
**FIGURE 1. Food Security Among CUNY Survey Respondents**



Source: 2018 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: According to the USDA, students at either low or very low food security are termed “food insecure.” For more details on the food security module used in this report, see Appendix C. Cumulative percentage may not add up to 100 due to rounding error.

**FIGURE 2. Food Insecurity Items Among CUNY Survey Respondents**



Source: 2018 #RealCollege Survey

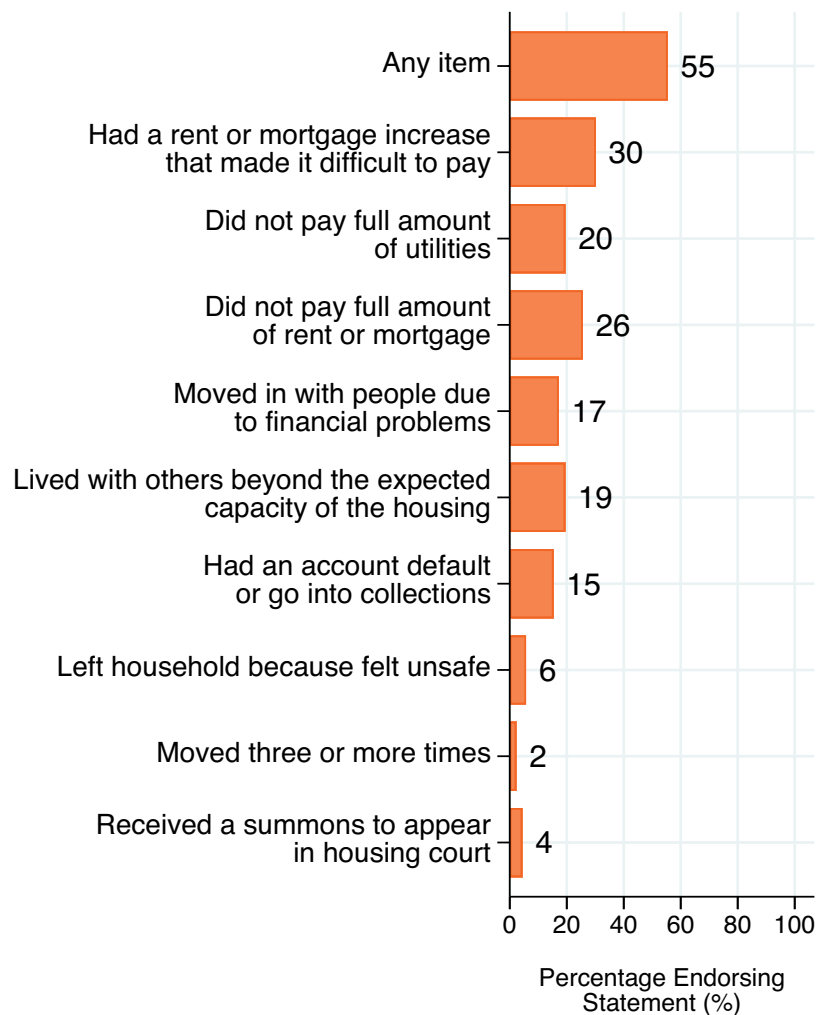
Notes: For more details on the food security module used in this report, see Appendix C.

## 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 CUNY students was assessed with a nine-item set of questions developed by the Hope Center.

Fifty-five percent of CUNY survey respondents experienced housing insecurity in the previous year (Figure 3). The most commonly reported challenges were experiencing a rent or mortgage increase (30%), not paying the full amount of their rent or mortgage (26%), and not paying the full cost of utilities (20%). Rates of housing insecurity are higher at community colleges compared to senior colleges (63% vs. 52%, Appendix E).

**FIGURE 3. Housing Insecurity Among CUNY Survey Respondents**



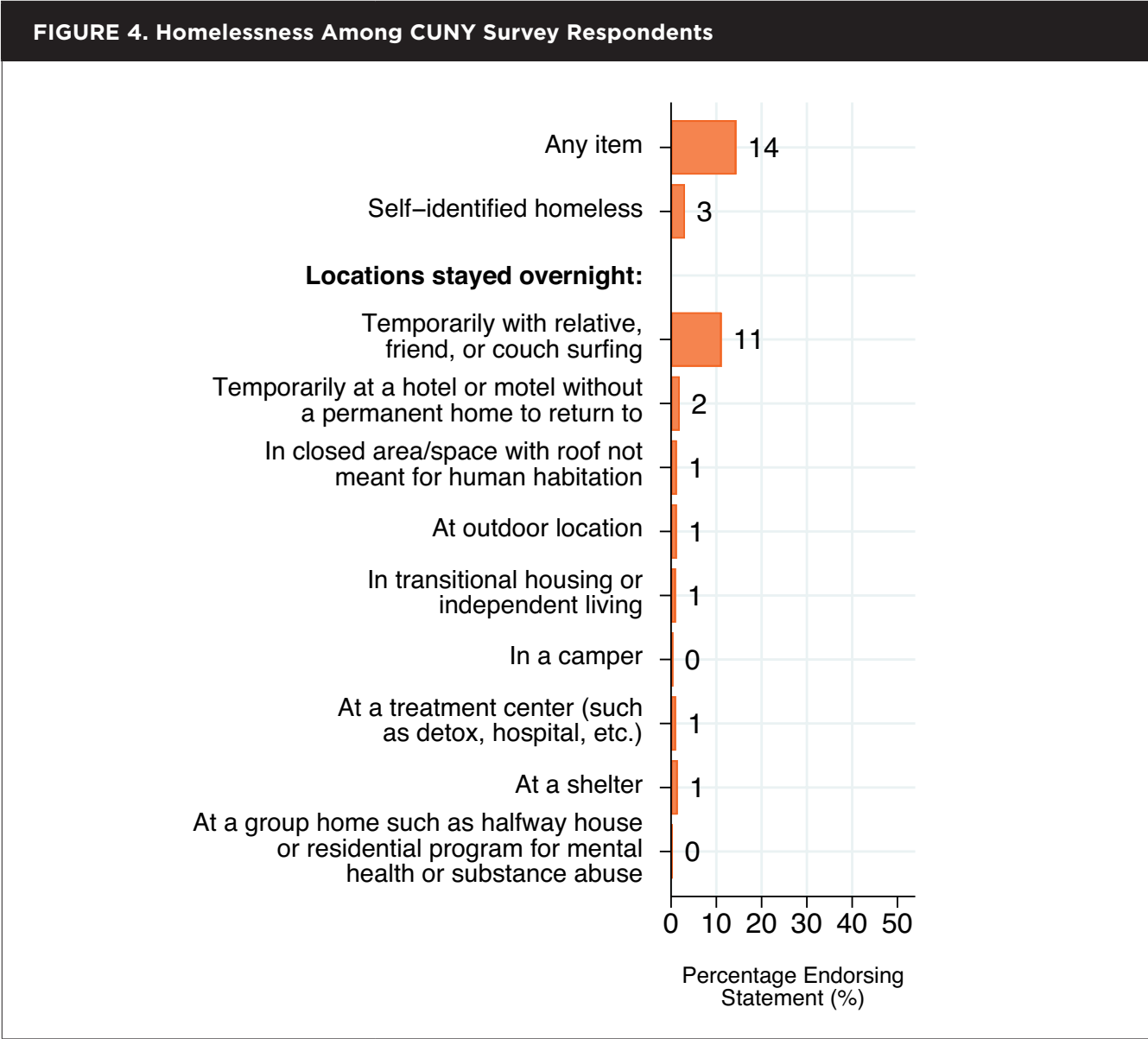
Source: 2018 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: For more details on the housing insecurity module 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. Homelessness was assessed with a tool developed by California State University researchers.

Homelessness affects 14% of CUNY survey respondents (Figure 4). Three percent of those respondents self-identify as homeless; 11% experience homelessness (e.g. 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. Rates of homelessness are higher at community colleges compared to senior colleges (18% vs. 13%, Appendix E).



Source: 2018 #RealCollege Survey

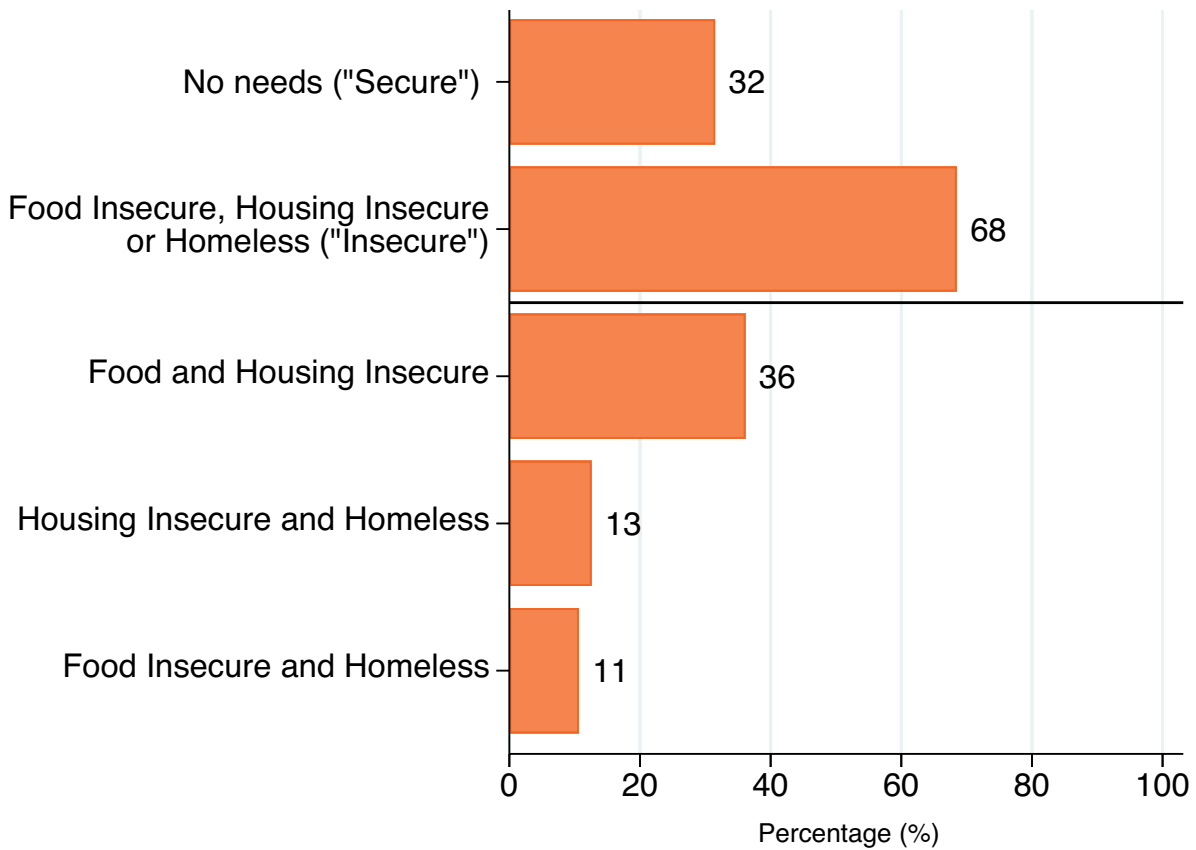
Notes: For more details on the homelessness module used in this report, see Appendix C.

## 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.

Nearly seven in 10 CUNY students responding to the survey experienced food insecurity or housing insecurity or homelessness during the previous year (Figure 5). In addition, 36% of respondents were both food and housing insecure in the past year, and 13% experienced both housing insecurity and homelessness during that time. Many of the latter group were also food insecure. Finally, 11% were both food insecure and homeless in the past year.

**FIGURE 5. Intersections of Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity, and Homelessness Among CUNY Survey Respondents**



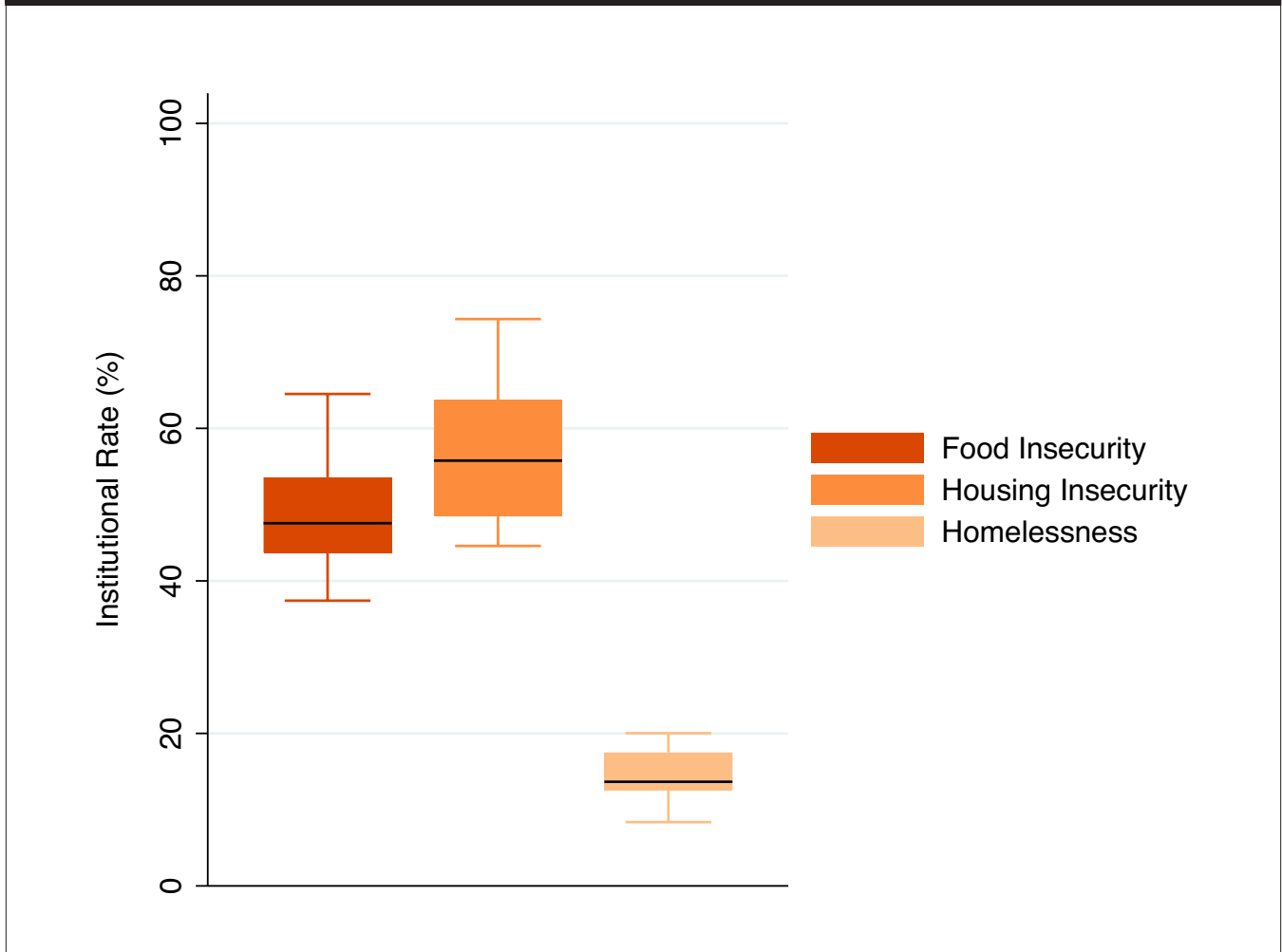
Source: 2018 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: For more detail on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, see Appendix C.

## VARIATION BY INSTITUTION

Rates of basic needs insecurity vary across institutions as well (Figure 6). There is wide variation in rates of food insecurity across CUNY institutions, from approximately 37% to 64%. Rates of housing insecurity across participating institutions range from a low of about 44% of students experiencing housing insecurity to a high of approximately 74%. Rates of student homelessness range from approximately 8% to 20%, with most participating institutions in the range of 13% to 18%.

**FIGURE 6. Variation in Institutional Rates of Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity, and Homelessness Among CUNY Survey Respondents**



Source: 2018 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: The horizontal line within each box represents the median institutional rate. For more detail on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, see Appendix C.



## SECTION 2:

# Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurity

Some CUNY 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. For more detailed information about disparities in basic needs insecurity by CUNY institutional type, please refer to Appendix F.

### DEMOGRAPHIC DISPARITIES IN BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY

Students who are heterosexual, male, or female have lower rates of basic needs insecurity compared with their peers (Table 1). Students who are transgender or chose not to identify themselves as female, male, or transgender have higher rates of food and housing insecurity compared with other gender orientations. Transgender students have the highest rate of homelessness at 34%, approximately double the rate of students identifying as male or female. Bisexual students have a rate 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 55%; these students have rates of housing insecurity and homelessness about seven percentage points higher than their heterosexual peers.

There are also sizable racial/ethnic disparities in basic needs insecurity among CUNY students. For example, rates of food insecurity among students identifying as African American or Black are 59%.

This is approximately six percentage points higher than rates for Hispanic or Latinx students, and 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 were more likely than U.S. citizens to experience food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness.

Higher levels of parental education are associated with a lower risk of food or housing insecurity, with the clearest disparities evident based on whether or not a student's parent possesses a bachelor's degree. Nonetheless, about 39% of CUNY students with college-educated parents experience food insecurity, and 47% experience housing insecurity.

Basic needs insecurity is more pronounced among older CUNY students, particularly students ages 26 to 30. Seventy-five percent of students surveyed ages 26 to 30 experience housing insecurity (compared with 39% for 18–20 year olds) and 20% experience homelessness (compared with 11% for 18–20 year olds).



**TABLE 1. Demographic Disparities in Rates of Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity, and Homelessness\***

	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Food Insecurity (%)</b>	<b>Housing Insecurity (%)</b>	<b>Homelessness (%)</b>
<b>GENDER ORIENTATION</b>				
Male	5,659	47	53	17
Female	14,737	49	57	13
Transgender	96	67	58	34
Does not identify as female, male, or transgender	277	61	64	27
<b>SEXUAL ORIENTATION</b>				
Heterosexual or straight	17,044	47	55	13
Gay or lesbian	661	55	62	19
Bisexual	1,477	58	59	21
Is not sure or neither heterosexual, gay, lesbian, or bisexual	1,227	52	57	19
<b>RACIAL OR ETHNIC BACKGROUND</b>				
White or Caucasian	3,204	39	47	14
African American or Black	4,522	59	64	17
Hispanic or Latinx	7,557	53	59	13
American Indian or Alaskan Native	200	54	62	22
Middle Eastern or North African or Arab or Arab American	538	41	52	14
Southeast Asian	1,714	42	51	15
Pacific Islander or native Hawaiian	149	52	52	17
Other Asian or Asian American	2,830	39	43	13
Other	924	50	61	18
Prefers not to answer	1,006	49	60	17

**TABLE 1. Demographic Disparities in Rates of Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity, and Homelessness\* (continued)**

	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Food Insecurity (%)</b>	<b>Housing Insecurity (%)</b>	<b>Homelessness (%)</b>
<b>STUDENT IS A U.S. CITIZEN OR PERMANENT RESIDENT</b>				
<b>Yes</b>	18,569	48	54	14
<b>No</b>	1,470	51	65	23
<b>Prefers not to answer</b>	515	46	59	15
<b>HIGHEST LEVEL OF PARENTAL EDUCATION</b>				
<b>No high school diploma</b>	4,293	52	59	14
<b>High school diploma</b>	4,369	48	52	14
<b>Some college</b>	6,943	53	60	16
<b>Bachelor's degree or greater</b>	3,922	39	47	13
<b>Does not know</b>	1,261	45	51	14
<b>AGE</b>				
<b>18 to 20</b>	7,434	41	39	11
<b>21 to 25</b>	7,532	51	58	17
<b>26 to 30</b>	2,622	58	75	20
<b>Older than 30</b>	3,096	53	73	13

\*Among CUNY survey respondents

Source: 2018 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: The Number of Students column indicates the number of survey respondents to 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. 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 2). Food insecurity and homelessness vary minimally with respect to part-time or full-time academic status, though full-time students experience less housing insecurity than their part-time peers, at 53% versus 64%. Students who spend three or more years in college have slightly higher rates of food insecurity than students still in their first year, at 51% compared with 45%. Slightly less than half of students in their first year of college are housing insecure, while 59% of students with at least three years of college 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 food and housing insecurity compared with students who do not receive the Pell.

In addition, students with children experience higher rates of food insecurity (57%) and housing insecurity (67%) as compared with those who do not have children; rates of homelessness did not vary. Students who are married or in a domestic partnership had lower rates of homelessness than their peers in other types of relationships. While the total number of students who reported being divorced (n=287) is small, the rates of food insecurity (62%), housing insecurity (80%), and homelessness (17%) are worth noting, as these rates are higher than those for any other relationship category.

**TABLE 2. Rates of Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity, and Homelessness by Student Life Experiences\***

	Number of Students	Food Insecurity (%)	Housing Insecurity (%)	Homelessness (%)
<b>COLLEGE ENROLLMENT STATUS</b>				
Full-time (at least 12 credits)	16,917	48	53	15
Part-time (fewer than 12 credits)	4,239	50	64	14
<b>YEARS IN COLLEGE</b>				
Less than 1	5,087	45	49	15
1 to 2	7,069	49	55	14
Three or more	8,974	51	59	14
<b>DEPENDENCY STATUS</b>				
Dependent	9,077	43	44	11
Independent	11,522	53	65	17

**TABLE 2. Rates of Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity, and Homelessness by Student Life Experiences\* (continued)**

	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Food Insecurity (%)</b>	<b>Housing Insecurity (%)</b>	<b>Homelessness (%)</b>
<b>STUDENT RECEIVES THE PELL GRANT</b>				
Yes	11,903	51	57	14
No	9,253	45	54	15
<b>STUDENT HAS CHILDREN</b>				
Yes	3,723	57	67	14
No	17,362	47	53	14
<b>RELATIONSHIP STATUS</b>				
Single	13,205	48	52	15
In a relationship	4,974	51	56	15
Married or domestic partnership	2,254	46	68	12
Divorced	287	62	80	17
Widowed	27	59	74	15
<b>STUDENT HAS BEEN IN FOSTER CARE</b>				
Yes	396	70	72	30
No	20,345	48	55	14
<b>STUDENT SERVED IN THE MILITARY</b>				
Yes	357	47	61	24
No	20,395	49	55	14
<b>EMPLOYMENT STATUS</b>				
Employed	12,566	53	62	16
Not employed, looking for work	4,544	48	49	13
Not employed, not looking for work	3,437	32	37	9

**TABLE 2. Rates of Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity, and Homelessness by Student Life Experiences\* (continued)**

	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Food Insecurity (%)</b>	<b>Housing Insecurity (%)</b>	<b>Homelessness (%)</b>
<b>STUDENT HAS BEEN CONVICTED OF A CRIME</b>				
<b>Yes</b>	108	62	80	42
<b>No</b>	20,562	48	55	14
<b>Prefers not to answer</b>	256	61	68	27
<b>DISABILITY OR MEDICAL CONDITION</b>				
<b>Learning disability (dyslexia, etc.)</b>	701	55	60	21
<b>Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)</b>	827	58	63	24
<b>Autism spectrum disorder</b>	133	53	54	22
<b>Physical disability (speech, sight, mobility, hearing, etc.)</b>	781	57	64	20
<b>Chronic illness (asthma, diabetes, autoimmune disorder, cancer, etc.)</b>	1,951	56	65	19
<b>Psychological disorder (depression, anxiety, etc.)</b>	3,883	60	64	22
<b>Other</b>	490	60	66	24
<b>No disability or medical condition</b>	14,523	45	53	12

\*Among CUNY survey respondents

Source: 2018 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: The Number of Students column indicates the number of survey respondents to 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 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 2 also illustrates variations in basic needs insecurity by student life circumstances. CUNY students who have been in the foster care system are much more likely to report basic needs insecurity than their peers. Seventy percent of these students experience food insecurity and 72% experience housing insecurity. Thirty percent of students who were formerly in foster care also experience homelessness.

Students who served in the military are more likely to experience homelessness (24%) than students who did not (14%). However, students with military experience are slightly less likely to experience food insecurity than students who were not in the military.

Within employment categories, students who were not employed and not looking for work experience the least amount of basic needs insecurity compared to their peers. However, employed students experience higher rates of basic needs insecurity in all three categories compared to their peers. For more detailed information about employment and basic needs insecurity, refer to Section 3.

Among students who reported that they had been convicted of a crime in the past, many encounter food and housing challenges while attending college. Sixty-two percent of respondents convicted of a crime experience food insecurity, while 80% experience housing insecurity. Also, a significant share of these students (42%) experience homelessness. Similarly, students who chose not to answer this question also reported higher rates of basic needs insecurity than students who were not convicted of a crime.

Basic needs insecurity varies widely by disability or medical condition. Students who reported having attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, a physical disability, chronic illness, or psychological disorder struggle the most with basic needs insecurity.



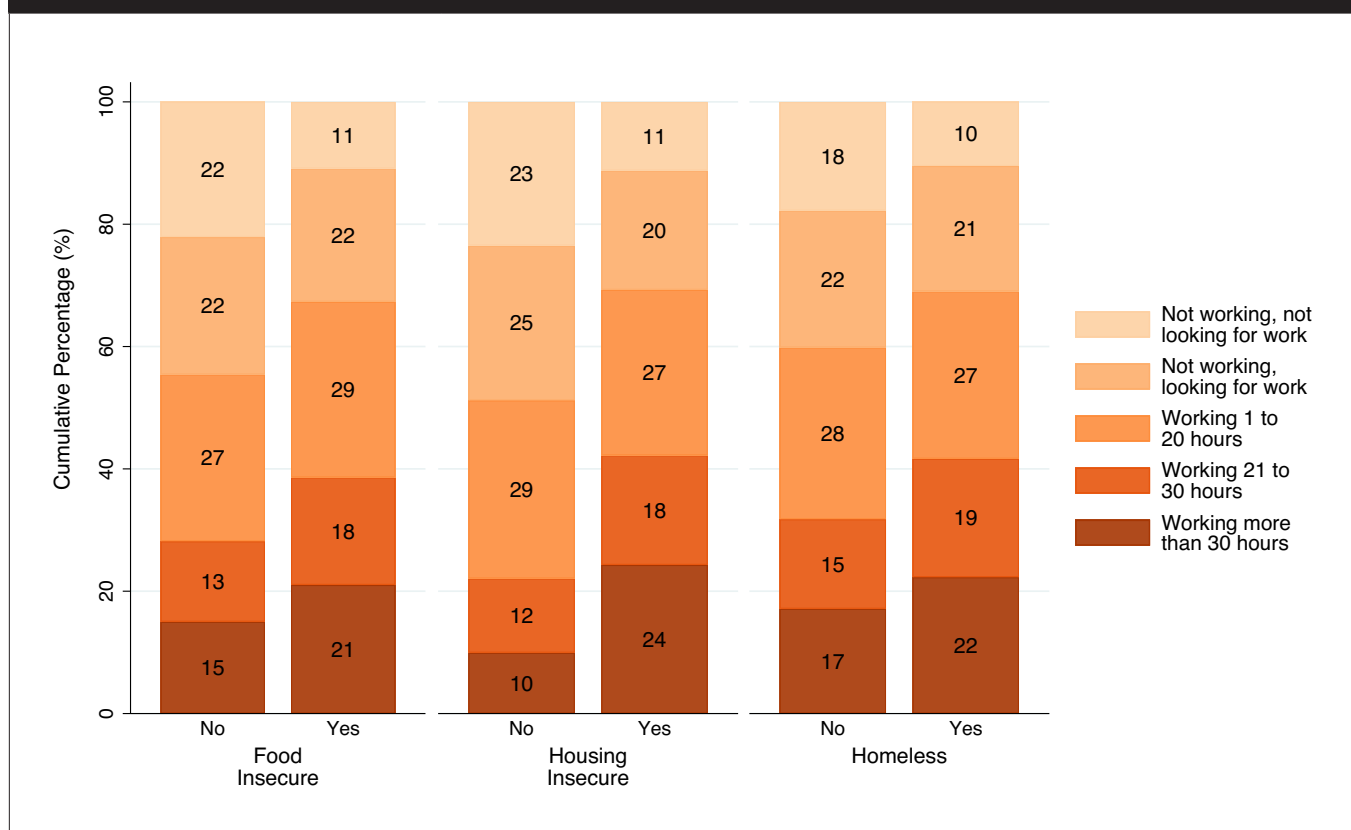


**SECTION 3:**

## Employment and Academic Performance

Like most American undergraduates, CUNY students experiencing basic needs insecurity are overwhelmingly part of the labor force. For example, the vast majority (89%) of students who experience food insecurity are employed or looking for work (Figure 7). 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 7. Employment Behavior by Basic Need Insecurity Status\***

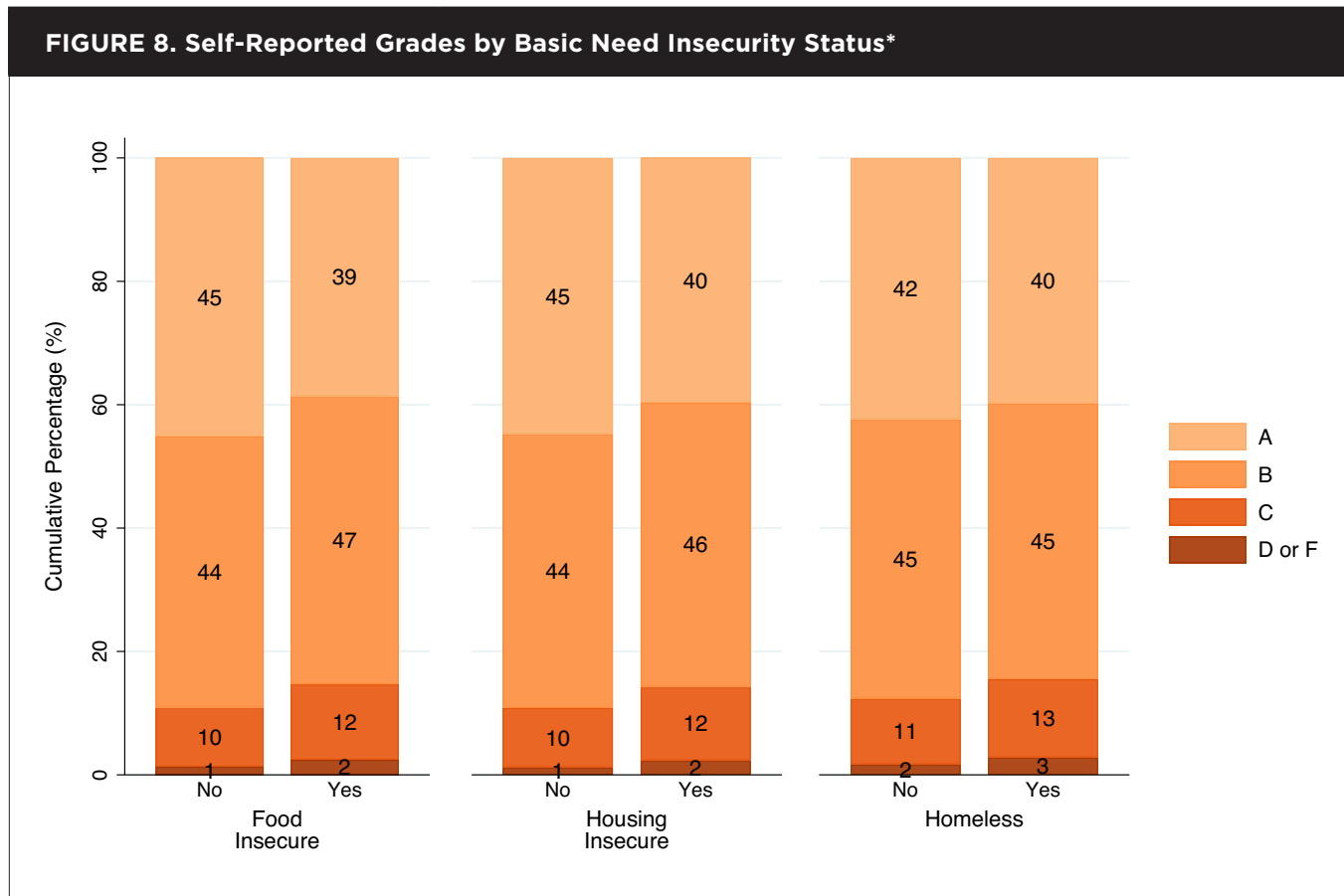


\*Among CUNY survey respondents

Source: 2018 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: For more detail on how each measure of insecurity was constructed, see Appendix C. Cumulative percentage may not add up to 100 due to rounding error.

Figure 8 illustrates that while most students report receiving A's and B's, students who experience basic needs insecurity and homelessness report grades of C or below at slightly higher rates than students who do not have these experiences.



\*Among CUNY survey respondents

Source: 2018 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: For more detail on how each measure of insecurity was constructed, see Appendix C. Cumulative percentage may not add up to 100 due to rounding error.



## SECTION 4:

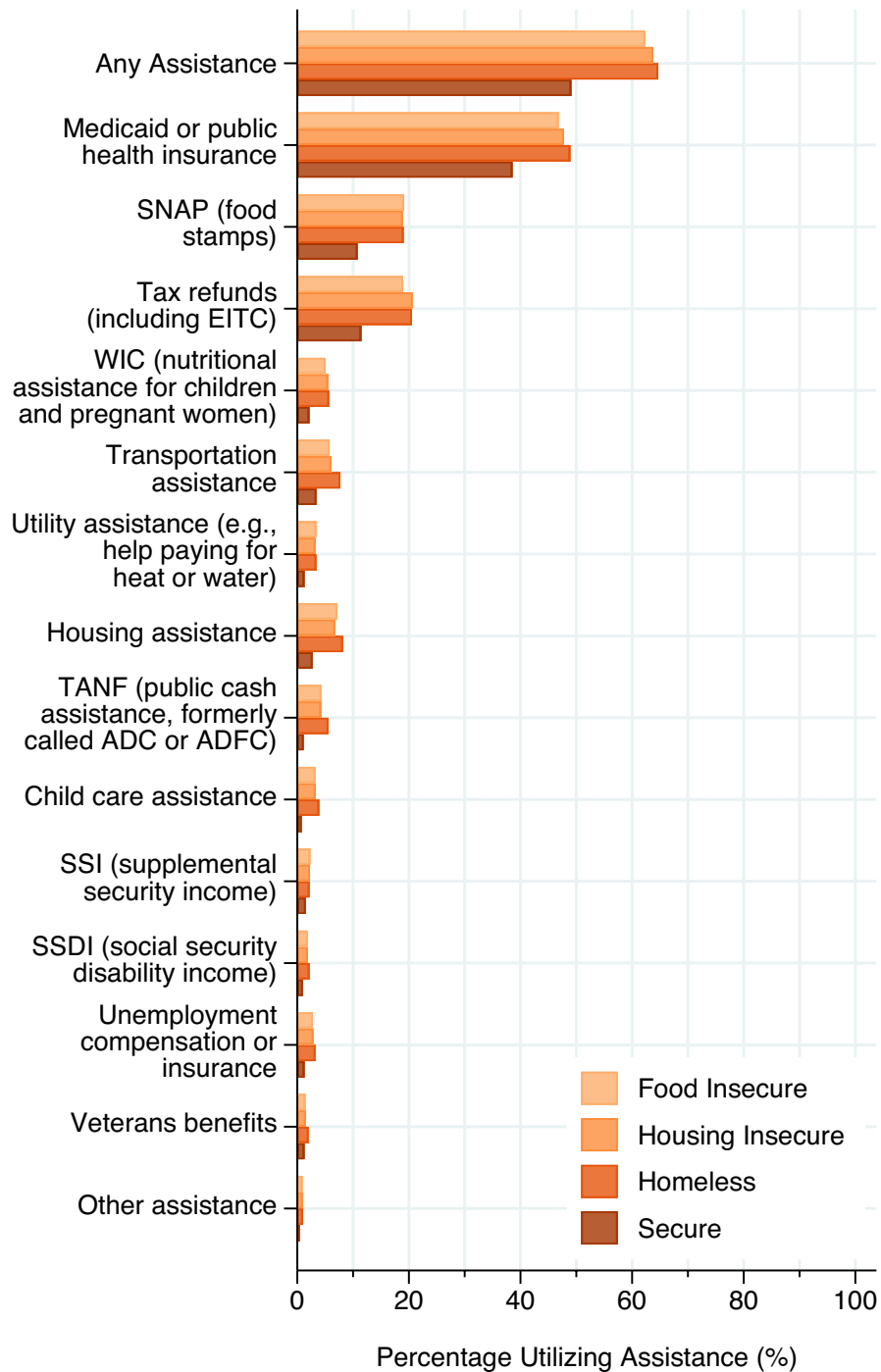
# Utilization of Supports

Many CUNY students who experience basic needs insecurity do not access public assistance (Figure 9). Nearly one in five 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.

Overall, Figure 9 highlights that students with basic needs insecurity are not accessing all of the public benefits that they could. It is also worth noting that students who are secure in their basic needs are still accessing public benefits, albeit at lower rates (49%) than students with food insecurity (62%), housing insecurity (64%), and homelessness (65%).<sup>9</sup>



**FIGURE 9. Use of Assistance Among CUNY 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-9. For more detail on how each measure of insecurity was constructed, see Appendix C.



## SECTION 5: Conclusion

The #RealCollege survey affirms what has been evident to CUNY administrators, faculty, staff, and students for many years: basic needs insecurity is a condition challenging many undergraduates trying to pursue credentials. The scope of the problem described here is more substantial than documented in prior reports (for more information see Appendix D for a joint letter from the Hope Center and Healthy CUNY), and should be cause for a systemic response.



# City University of New York #RealCollege Survey Appendices

# Appendix A. Participating Postsecondary Institutions in this Report

## **2018 #REALCOLLEGE SURVEY CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK (CUNY) PARTICIPANTS**

Borough Of Manhattan Community College

Baruch College

Bronx Community College

Brooklyn College

College of Staten Island

CUNY School Of Professional Studies\*

Guttman Community College

Hostos Community College

Hunter College

John Jay College Of Criminal Justice

Kingborough Community College

LaGuardia Community College

Lehman College

Medgar Evers College

New York City College Of Technology

Queens College

Queensborough Community College

The City College Of New York

York College

*\* Students from the CUNY School Of Professional Studies are considered Senior College attendees in this report.*

# Appendix B. Survey Methodology

## SURVEY ELIGIBILITY

Together with the CUNY's Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA), the Hope Center fielded this survey to all institutions in the CUNY system. The OIRA fielded the survey centrally in fall 2018 and offered the opportunity to enter a raffle to win a weekly unlimited Metrocard in order to boost response rates. This same incentive is often used in studies in New York City. OIRA sent a series of invitations and follow-up reminders to all enrolled students encouraging them to participate. The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice provided the email invitation language as shown below as well as designed the survey. Upon opening the survey, students were presented with a consent form in compliance with Institutional Review Board standards. To actually take the survey the student must have clicked continue as a record of his/her consent and completed a minimum of the first page of the survey to be included in the analysis.

***Subject: #RealCollege: Speak out - chance to win a Metrocard!***

*Dear [NAME]*

*Making it in college these days can be tough. We want to help! In order to improve services and student supports, we first need to know about the lives of real students. This survey is all about you, your personal experiences and everyday needs. Sharing your challenges will provide insights we can use to help students succeed. After you complete the survey, you will be entered for a chance to win an unlimited weekly MetroCard.*

**Click here to take the survey!**

*All of your responses will be kept confidential.*

*Thank you in advance for your participation. If you have any questions about this study, please contact our survey team at [CUNYSurvey2@cuny.edu](mailto:CUNYSurvey2@cuny.edu)*

*Sincerely,*



**Colin Chellman**

*University Dean for Institutional and Policy Research*

## COLLEGE SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

Nineteen CUNY institutions fielded the survey early in fall term, as students enduring basic needs insecurity are at greater risk for dropping out of school later in the year (see Appendix A for a list of participating institutions).<sup>10</sup>

**TABLE B-1. Characteristics of Participating Institutions**

	<b>Community Colleges (n=7) Percentage</b>	<b>Senior Colleges (n=11) Percentage</b>	<b>System (n=18) Percentage</b>
<b>UNDERGRADUATE POPULATION</b>			
<b>Fewer than 5,000</b>	14	0	6
<b>5,000-9,999</b>	14	18	17
<b>10,000-19,999</b>	57	73	67
<b>20,000 or more</b>	14	9	11
<b>UNDERGRADUATES AWARDED PELL GRANTS</b>			
<b>Less than 25%</b>	0	0	0
<b>25%-49%</b>	43	45	44
<b>50%-74%</b>	57	55	56
<b>75% or more</b>	0	0	0

Source: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (2018). Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/>

Notes: The information above reflects the characteristics of 18 institutions as of the fall of 2017 with the exception of the information on Pell awardees, which was collected in the fall of 2016. The Professional Studies program was missing IPEDS information and are not included in the table. Cumulative percentage may not add up to 100 due to rounding error.

## **STUDENT SURVEY PARTICIPANTS**

Most students who were sent the #RealCollege survey did not answer it. Institutions sent survey invitations to an estimated 244,420 undergraduate students and 21,665 students participated, yielding a response rate of 9%.<sup>11</sup> 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.



**TABLE B-2. Characteristics of CUNY Survey Respondents**

	<b>Community Colleges Percentage</b>	<b>Senior Colleges Percentage</b>	<b>System Percentage</b>
<b>GENDER ORIENTATION</b>			
Male	26	28	27
Female	72	70	71
Transgender	0	0	0
Do not identify as female, male, or transgender	1	1	1
<b>SEXUAL ORIENTATION</b>			
Heterosexual or straight	83	84	83
Gay or lesbian	4	3	3
Bisexual	7	7	7
Is not sure or neither heterosexual, gay, lesbian, or bisexual	7	6	6
<b>RACIAL OR ETHNIC BACKGROUND</b>			
White or Caucasian	12	17	15
African American or Black	25	21	22
Hispanic or Latinx	42	34	36
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1	1	1
Middle Eastern or North African or Arab or Arab American	2	3	3
Southeast Asian	7	9	8
Pacific Islander or native Hawaiian	1	1	1
Other Asian or Asian-American	11	15	14
Other	4	5	4
Prefers not to answer	5	5	5
<b>STUDENT IS A U.S. CITIZEN OR PERMANENT RESIDENT</b>			
Yes	88	92	90
No	9	6	7
Prefers not to answer	3	2	3

TABLE B-2. Characteristics of Survey Respondents (continued)

	Community Colleges Percentage	Senior Colleges Percentage	System Percentage
<b>HIGHEST LEVEL OF PARENTAL EDUCATION</b>			
No high school diploma	22	20	21
High school diploma	24	20	21
Some college	32	34	33
Bachelor's degree or greater	14	21	19
Does not know	7	6	6
<b>AGE</b>			
18 to 20	30	39	36
21 to 25	34	37	36
26 to 30	17	11	13
Older than 30	19	13	15
<b>COLLEGE ENROLLMENT STATUS</b>			
Full-time (at least 12 credits)	76	82	80
Part-time (fewer than 12 credits)	24	18	20
<b>YEARS IN COLLEGE</b>			
Less than 1	33	20	24
1 to 2	46	28	33
3 or more	21	52	42
<b>DEPENDENCY STATUS</b>			
Dependent	31	50	44
Independent	69	50	56
<b>STUDENT RECEIVES THE PELL GRANT</b>			
Yes	53	58	56
No	47	42	44
<b>STUDENT HAS CHILDREN</b>			
Yes	20	17	18
No	80	83	82

TABLE B-2. Characteristics of Survey Respondents (continued)

	Community Colleges Percentage	Senior Colleges Percentage	System Percentage
<b>RELATIONSHIP STATUS</b>			
Single	61	65	64
In a relationship	23	24	24
Married or domestic partnership	14	9	11
Divorced	2	1	1
Widowed	0	0	0
<b>STUDENT HAS BEEN IN FOSTER CARE</b>			
Yes	3	2	2
No	97	98	98
<b>STUDENT SERVED IN THE MILITARY</b>			
Yes	2	2	2
No	98	98	98
<b>EMPLOYMENT STATUS</b>			
Employed	58	62	61
Not Employed, Looking	24	21	22
Not Employed, Not looking	18	16	17
<b>STUDENT HAS BEEN CONVICTED OF A CRIME</b>			
Yes	1	0	1
No	97	99	98
Prefers not to answer	2	1	1
<b>DISABILITY OR MEDICAL CONDITION</b>			
Learning disability (dyslexia, etc.)	5	3	3
Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)	4	4	4
Autism spectrum disorder	1	1	1
Physical disability (speech, sight, mobility, hearing, etc.)	4	4	4

**TABLE B-2. Characteristics of Survey Respondents (continued)**

	<b>Community Colleges Percentage</b>	<b>Senior Colleges Percentage</b>	<b>System Percentage</b>
<b>Chronic illness (asthma, diabetes, autoimmune disorders, cancer, etc.)</b>	10	9	9
<b>Psychological disorder (depression, anxiety, etc.)</b>	18	19	19
<b>Other</b>	3	2	2
<b>No disability or medical condition</b>	67	67	67

Source: 2018 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Classifications of gender orientation, racial or ethnic background, and disability or medical condition are not mutually exclusive. Students could self-identify with multiple classifications. Percentages of mutually exclusive groups may not add up to 100 due to rounding error. References to 0% reflect values less than 1%.

# Appendix C. Three Survey Measures of Basic Needs Insecurity

## 1. Food Security

To assess food security in 2018, we used questions from the 18-item Household Food Security Survey Module (shown below) from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). It is important to note that while we mainly discuss insecurity, the standard is to measure the level of security, referring to those with low or very low security as “food insecure.”

### **FOOD SECURITY MODULE**

#### **Adult Stage 1**

1. “In the last 30 days, I worried whether my food would run out before I got money to buy more.” (Often true, Sometimes true, Never true)
2. “In the last 30 days, the food that I bought just didn’t last, and I didn’t have money to get more.” (Often true, Sometimes true, Never true)
3. “In the last 30 days, I couldn’t afford to eat balanced meals.” (Often true, Sometimes true, Never true)

If the respondent answers “often true” or “sometimes true” to any of the three questions in Adult Stage 1, then proceed to Adult Stage 2.

#### **Adult Stage 2**

4. “In the last 30 days, did you ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn’t enough money for food?” (Yes/No)
5. [If yes to question 4, ask] “In the last 30 days, how many days did this happen?” (Once, Twice, Three times, Four times, Five times, More than five times)
6. “In the last 30 days, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn’t enough money for food?” (Yes/No)
7. “In the last 30 days, were you ever hungry but didn’t eat because there wasn’t enough money for food?” (Yes/No)
8. “In the last 30 days, did you lose weight because there wasn’t enough money for food?” (Yes/No)

If the respondent answers “yes” to any of the questions in Adult Stage 2, then proceed to Adult Stage 3.

#### **Adult Stage 3**

9. “In the last 30 days, did you ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn’t enough money for food?” (Yes/No)
10. [If yes to question 9, ask] “In the last 30 days, how many days did this happen?” (Once, Twice, Three times, Four times, Five times, More than five times)



If the respondent has indicated that children under 18 are present in the household, then proceed to Child Stage 1.

**Child Stage 1**

- 11. “In the last 30 days, I relied on only a few kinds of low-cost food to feed my children because I was running out of money to buy food.” (Often true, Sometimes true, Never true)
- 12. “In the last 30 days, I couldn’t feed my children a balanced meal, because I couldn’t afford that.” (Often true, Sometimes true, Never true)
- 13. “In the last 30 days, my child was not eating enough because I just couldn’t afford enough food.” (Often true, Sometimes true, Never true)

If the respondent answers “often true” or “sometimes true” to any of the three questions in Child Stage 1, then proceed to Child Stage 2.

**Child Stage 2**

- 14. “In the last 30 days, did you ever cut the size of your children’s meals because there wasn’t enough money for food?” (Yes/No)
- 15. “In the last 30 days, did your children ever skip meals because there wasn’t enough money for food?” (Yes/No)
- 16. [If yes to question 15, ask] “In the last 30 days, how often did this happen?” (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 or more times)
- 17. “In the last 30 days, were your children ever hungry but you just couldn’t afford more food?” (Yes/No)
- 18. “In the last 30 days, did any of your children ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn’t enough money for food?” (Yes/No)

To calculate a raw score for food security, we counted the number of questions to which a student answered affirmatively.

- a. “Often true” and “sometimes true” were counted as affirmative answers.
- b. Answers of “Three times” or more were counted as a “yes.” We translated the raw score into food security levels as follows:

**RAW SCORE**

	18-item (children present)	18-item (no children present)
FOOD SECURITY LEVEL		
<b>High</b>	0	0
<b>Marginal</b>	1-2	1-2
<b>Low</b>	3-7	3-5
<b>Very Low</b>	8-18	6-10

## 2. Housing Insecurity

To assess housing insecurity, we used a series of survey questions adapted from the national Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) Adult Well-Being Module to measure students' access to and ability to pay for safe and reliable housing.<sup>12</sup> In 2018, we asked students the following questions:

### HOUSING INSECURITY MODULE

1. "In the past 12 months, was there a rent or mortgage increase that made it difficult to pay?" (Yes/No)
2. "In the past 12 months, have you been unable to pay or underpaid your rent or mortgage?" (Yes/No)
3. "In the past 12 months, have you received a summons to appear in housing court?" (Yes/No)
4. "In the past 12 months, have you not paid the full amount of a gas, oil, or electricity bill?" (Yes/No)
5. "In the past 12 months, did you have an account default or go into collections?" (Yes/No)
6. "In the past 12 months, have you moved in with other people, even for a little while, because of financial problems?" (Yes/No)
7. "In the past 12 months, have you lived with others beyond the expected capacity of the house or apartment?" (Yes/No)
8. "In the past 12 months, did you leave your household because you felt unsafe?" (Yes/No)
9. "In the past 12 months, how many times have you moved?" (None, Once, Twice, 3 times, 4 times, 5 times, 6 times, 7 times, 8 times, 9 times, 10 or more times)

In 2018, students were considered housing insecure if they answered "yes" to any of the first eight questions or said they moved at least three times (question #9).

## 3. Homelessness

To measure homelessness, we asked a series of survey questions that align with the definition of homelessness dictated by the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act. Please refer to pp. 31-32 in Crutchfield and Maguire (2017) for further discussion of this measure.<sup>13</sup> In 2018, students were considered homeless if they answered affirmatively to question #1 OR any part of question #2 (parts e through m) in the Homelessness Module (below).

### HOMELESSNESS MODULE

1. "In the past 12 months, have you ever been homeless?"
2. "In the past 12 months, have you slept in any of the following places? Please check all that apply."
  - a. Campus or university housing
  - b. Sorority/fraternity house

- c. In a rented or owned house, mobile home, or apartment (alone or with roommates or friends)
- d. In a rented or owned house, mobile home, or apartment with my family (parent, guardian, or relative)
- e. At a shelter
- f. In a camper
- g. Temporarily staying with a relative, friend, or couch surfing until I find other housing
- h. Temporarily at a hotel or motel without a permanent home to return to (not on vacation or business travel)
- i. In transitional housing or independent living program
- j. At a group home such as halfway house or residential program for mental health or substance abuse
- k. At a treatment center (such as detox, hospital, etc.)
- l. Outdoor location (such as street, sidewalk, or alley; bus or train stop; campground or woods, park, beach, or riverbed; under bridge or overpass; or other)
- m. In a closed area/space with a roof not meant for human habitation (such as abandoned building; car, truck, van, RV, or camper; encampment or tent; unconverted garage, attic, or basement; etc.)

# Appendix D. Food Insecurity Prevalence Rates in the #RealCollege and Healthy CUNY Surveys

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Since 2010, Healthy CUNY has assessed the health and well-being of undergraduates throughout the CUNY system. While the estimated rates of campus food insecurity have varied over time, Healthy CUNY has generally reported rates of approximately 20% in the last several years, after a significant drop between 2010 and 2015. However, the #RealCollege survey, fielded in fall 2018, estimates a much higher prevalence of food insecurity on CUNY campuses at 48%.

As colleagues and researchers committed to an accurate understanding of the challenges facing undergraduates, our teams compared results in an attempt to make sense of the differences. We attribute them to three issues.

## 1. How food security is measured:

Both the Healthy CUNY and #RealCollege surveys assess food insecurity using questions developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The Healthy CUNY survey uses four questions from the USDA's 6-item module while the #RealCollege survey uses the 18-item USDA Household Food Security Survey Module, which has been shown to be a stable, robust, and reliable measurement tool. The USDA's *Guide to Measuring Household Food Security* states:

*[The use of the modules multiple indicator questions is] "critical for accurately assessing the prevalence of food insecurity because the greater the severity, the less the prevalence and each separate indicator captures a different degree of severity. The frequency of the various indicators varies widely depending upon exactly which level of severity each one reflects... A variety of indicators is needed to capture the various combinations of food conditions, experiences, and behaviors that, as a group, characterize each such stage. This is what the 18-item "core module" set of indicators provides." (p.2)*

The Healthy CUNY and #RealCollege surveys also offer different response categories for each question. When the questions ask the frequency with which a situation occurred, the USDA's module prescribes three response options: often true, sometimes true, and never true; often and sometimes true are considered affirmative responses. In contrast, Healthy CUNY offers four response options: often true, sometimes true, rarely true, and never and codes the first two responses as affirmative.

The resulting data from individual questions is then used to compute a student's food security. The #RealCollege survey follows the USDA's approach and assigns a level of food security based

on a continuum. In the Healthy CUNY survey, individuals with at least two affirmative responses are labeled food insecure.

## 2. Timing of Measurement:

The 2018 Healthy CUNY survey was fielded in the late fall/ early spring term, while the 2018 #RealCollege survey was fielded earlier in the fall semester. Fall to spring attrition is higher among students with more unmet financial need. Thus, it is likely that a fall survey reaches a larger pool of students at higher risk of both food insecurity and dropping out while the Healthy CUNY Spring survey reached a population that has been enrolled at CUNY for a longer period of time.

## 3. Sample:

The Healthy CUNY survey utilizes a stratified random sample of CUNY undergraduates and each year includes around 2,000 students. Results are weighted to resemble all CUNY undergraduates on key student characteristics. The survey uses monetary incentives (\$25) and includes follow-up phone surveys for those who don't respond online. In contrast, the #RealCollege survey is a census, offers negligible lottery incentives, and is conducted online. The sample includes about 22,000 students of CUNY's 244,420 undergraduates.

For decades, food security was overlooked as a college completion issue. We are glad that research is playing a role in uncovering challenges and illuminating solutions. Healthy CUNY and the Hope Center will continue to work together to inform discussions about supporting CUNY students with the best available data and analyses.



## Appendix E. Additional Analyses for CUNY Overall, and by College Type

**TABLE E-1. Food Security Among CUNY Survey Respondents (Figure 1)**

	Community College		Senior College		Overall System	
	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage
<b>FOOD SECURITY LEVEL</b>						
<b>High</b>	2,021	31	5,365	37	7,386	35
<b>Marginal</b>	1,109	17	2,339	16	3,448	16
<b>Low</b>	1,459	22	2,810	19	4,269	20
<b>Very Low</b>	2,003	30	3,930	27	5,933	28

Source: 2018 #RealCollege surveys

Notes: According to the USDA, students at either low or very low food security were considered “food insecure.” For more details on the food security module used in this report, see Appendix C. Cumulative percentage may not add up to 100 due to rounding error.

**TABLE E-2. Food Insecurity Among CUNY Survey Respondents (Figure 2)**

	Community College		Senior College		Overall System	
	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage
<b>I worried whether my food would run out before I got money to buy more.</b>	3,750	57	7,091	49	10,841	52
<b>I couldn’t afford to eat balanced meals.</b>	3,794	58	7,657	53	11,451	54
<b>The food that I bought just didn’t last and I didn’t have the money to buy more.</b>	3,134	48	5,675	39	8,809	42
<b>I cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there wasn’t enough money for food.</b>	2,790	42	5,582	39	8,372	40
<b>I ate less than I felt I should because there wasn’t enough money for food.</b>	2,635	40	5,257	37	7,892	38

I was hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food.	2,249	34	4,569	32	6,818	32
I cut the size of meals or skipped because there wasn't enough money for food. (Three or more times)	1,811	28	3,831	27	5,642	27
I lost weight because there wasn't enough money for food.	1,429	22	2,612	18	4,041	19
I did not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food.	886	13	1,505	10	2,391	11
I did not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food. (Three or more times)	522	8	834	6	1,356	6

Source: 2018 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: For more details on the food security module used in this report, see Appendix C.

**TABLE E-3. Housing Insecurity Among CUNY Survey Respondents (Figure 3)**

	Community College		Senior College		Overall System	
	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage
<b>Any item</b>	4,202	63	7,528	52	11,730	55
<b>Had a rent or mortgage increase that made it difficult to pay</b>	2,257	34	4,112	28	6,369	30
<b>Did not pay full utilities</b>	1,510	23	2,578	18	4,088	20
<b>Did not pay full amount of rent or mortgage</b>	2,094	32	3,310	23	5,404	26
<b>Moved in with people due to financial problems</b>	1,392	21	2,217	15	3,609	17
<b>Lived with others beyond the expected capacity of the housing</b>	1,547	24	2,534	18	4,081	19

**TABLE E-3. Housing Insecurity Among CUNY Survey Respondents (Figure 3) (continued)**

	Community College		Senior College		Overall System	
	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage
Had an account default or go into collections	1,303	20	1,912	13	3,215	15
Left household because felt unsafe	424	7	751	5	1,175	6
Moved three or more times	206	3	278	2	484	2
Received a summons to appear in housing court	367	6	558	4	925	4

Source: 2018 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: For more details on the housing insecurity module used in this report, see Appendix C.

**TABLE E-4. Homelessness Among CUNY Survey Respondents (Figure 4)**

	Community College		Senior College		Overall System	
	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage
Any item	1,195	18	1,848	13	3,043	14
Have been homeless	298	5	353	2	651	3
<b>LOCATIONS STAYED OVERNIGHT</b>						
Temporarily with relative, friend or couch surfing	922	14	1,416	10	2,338	11
Temporarily at a hotel or motel without a permanent home to return to	158	2	247	2	405	2
In closed area/space with roof not meant for human habitation (such as abandoned building; car, truck, van, RV, or camper; encampment or tent; unconverted garage, attic, or basement; etc.)	89	1	176	1	265	1

**TABLE E-4. Homelessness Among CUNY Survey Respondents (Figure 4) (continued)**

	Community College		Senior College		Overall System	
	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage
At outdoor location (such as street, sidewalk, or alley; bus or train stop; campground or woods, park, beach, or riverbed; under bridge or overpass; or other)	97	1	164	1	261	1
In transitional housing or independent living	87	1	121	1	208	1
In a camper	28	0	63	0	91	0
At a treatment center (such as detox, hospital, etc.)	72	1	150	1	222	1
At a shelter	144	2	155	1	299	1
At a group home such as halfway house or residential program for mental health or substance abuse	29	0	57	0	86	0

Source: 2018 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: For more details on the homelessness module used in this report, see Appendix C. References to 0% reflect values less than 1%.

**TABLE E-5. Intersections of Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity, and Homelessness Among CUNY Survey Respondents (Figure 5)**

	Community College		Senior College		Overall System	
	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage
No needs ("Secure")	1,692	26	4,982	34	6,674	32
Food insecure, housing insecure, or homeless ("Insecure")	4,933	74	9,566	66	14,499	68
Food and housing insecure	2,806	42	4,848	33	7,654	36

**TABLE E-5. Intersections of Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity, and Homelessness Among CUNY Survey Respondents (Figure 5) (continued)**

	Community College		Senior College		Overall System	
	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage
<b>Housing insecure and homeless</b>	1,079	16	1,585	11	2,664	13
<b>Food insecure and housing</b>	901	14	1,350	9	2,251	11

Source: 2018 #RealCollege surveys

Notes: For more detail on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, see Appendix C.

**TABLE E-6. Variation in Institutional Rates of Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity, and Homelessness Among CUNY Survey Respondents (Figure 6)**

	Number of Students	Mean	Standard Deviation	P25	P50 (Median)	P75
<b>Food insecurity rate</b>	19	49	7	44	48	54
<b>Housing insecurity rate</b>	19	57	9	49	56	64
<b>Homelessness rate</b>	19	15	3	13	14	18

Source: 2018 #RealCollege surveys

Notes: For more detail on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, see Appendix C.

**TABLE E-7. Employment Behavior by Basic Needs Insecurity Status\* (Figure 7)**

	Community College		Senior College		Overall System	
	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage
<b>FOOD INSECURE—NO</b>						
<b>Not working, not looking for work</b>	709	23	1,620	22	2,329	22
<b>Not working, looking for work</b>	721	24	1,646	22	2,367	22
<b>Working 1 to 20 hours</b>	673	22	2,200	29	2,873	27
<b>Working 21 to 30 hours</b>	392	13	995	13	1,387	13
<b>Working more than 30 hours</b>	530	18	1,050	14	1,580	15

TABLE E-7. Employment Behavior by Basic Needs Insecurity Status\* (Figure 7) (continued)

	Community College		Senior College		Overall System	
	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage
<b>FOOD INSECURE—YES</b>						
Not working, not looking for work	420	13	656	10	1,076	11
Not working, looking for work	781	23	1,375	21	2,156	22
Working 1 to 20 hours	848	25	1,993	30	2,841	29
Working 21 to 30 hours	518	16	1,220	19	1,738	18
Working more than 30 hours	770	23	1,310	20	2,080	21
<b>HOUSING INSECURE—NO</b>						
Not working, not looking for work	631	27	1,536	22	2,167	23
Not working, looking for work	639	27	1,699	25	2,338	25
Working 1 to 20 hours	548	22	2,139	31	2,687	29
Working 21 to 30 hours	256	11	865	13	1,121	12
Working more than 30 hours	293	12	624	9	917	10
<b>HOUSING INSECURE—YES</b>						
Not working, not looking for work	505	13	765	10	1,270	11
Not working, looking for work	869	22	1,340	18	2,209	20
Working 1 to 20 hours	981	24	2,084	29	3,065	27
Working 21 to 30 hours	659	16	1,369	19	2,028	18
Working more than 30 hours	1,011	25	1,741	24	2,752	24
<b>HOMELESS—NO</b>						
Not working, not looking for work	996	19	2,134	17	3,130	18
Not working, looking for work	1,234	24	2,709	22	3,943	22



**TABLE E-7. Employment Behavior by Basic Needs Insecurity Status\* (Figure 7) (continued)**

	Community College		Senior College		Overall System	
	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage
Working 1 to 20 hours	1,251	24	3,697	30	4,948	28
Working 21 to 30 hours	724	14	1,854	15	2,578	15
Working more than 30 hours	1,041	20	1,976	16	3,017	17
<b>HOMELESS—YES</b>						
Not working, not looking for work	140	12	167	9	307	10
Not working, looking for work	272	24	329	18	601	21
Working 1 to 20 hours	276	24	526	29	802	27
Working 21 to 30 hours	191	17	377	21	568	19
Working more than 30 hours	263	23	390	22	653	22

\* Among CUNY survey respondents

Source: 2018 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: For more detail on how each measure of insecurity was constructed, see Appendix C.

**TABLE E-8. Self-Reported Grades by Basic Needs Insecurity Status\* (Figure 8)**

	Community College		Senior College		Overall System	
	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage
<b>FOOD INSECURE—NO</b>						
A	1,053	41	3,240	47	4,292	45
B	1,114	43	3,055	44	4,169	44
C	352	14	566	8	918	10
D or F	67	3	57	1	124	1
<b>FOOD INSECURE—YES</b>						
A	1,061	37	2,372	39	3,433	39
B	1,245	43	2,910	48	4,155	47

**TABLE E-8. Self-Reported Grades by Basic Needs Insecurity Status\* (Figure 8) (continued)**

	Community College		Senior College		Overall System	
	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage
<b>C</b>	460	16	627	10	1,087	12
<b>D or F</b>	110	4	106	2	216	2
<b>HOUSING INSECURE—NO</b>						
<b>A</b>	776	39	2,907	47	3,683	45
<b>B</b>	876	44	2,774	45	3,650	44
<b>C</b>	300	15	492	8	792	10
<b>D or F</b>	58	3	42	1	100	1
<b>HOUSING INSECURE—YES</b>						
<b>A</b>	1,342	39	2,737	40	4,079	40
<b>B</b>	1,497	43	3,227	47	4,724	46
<b>C</b>	518	15	716	11	1,234	12
<b>D or F</b>	119	3	123	2	242	2
<b>HOMELESS—NO</b>						
<b>A</b>	1,734	39	4,982	44	6,716	42
<b>B</b>	1,970	44	5,231	46	7,201	45
<b>C</b>	661	15	1,033	9	1,694	11
<b>D or F</b>	138	3	130	1	268	2
<b>HOMELESS—YES</b>						
<b>A</b>	381	39	662	40	1,043	40
<b>B</b>	403	41	768	47	1,171	45
<b>C</b>	157	16	175	11	332	13
<b>D or F</b>	39	4	35	2	74	3

\* Among CUNY survey respondents

Source: 2018 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: For more detail on how each measure of insecurity was constructed, see Appendix C.

**TABLE E-9. Use of Public Assistance by Basic Needs Insecurity Status\* (Figure 9)**

	Community College		Senior College		Overall System	
	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage
<b>FOOD INSECURE</b>						
Any Assistance	2,319	67	4,007	60	6,326	62
Medicaid or public health insurance	1,746	51	3,001	45	4,747	47
SNAP (food stamps)	794	23	1,149	17	1,943	19
Tax refunds (including EITC)	716	21	1,206	18	1,922	19
WIC (nutritional assistance for children and pregnant women)	244	7	268	4	512	5
Transportation assistance	312	9	275	4	587	6
Utility assistance (e.g., help paying for heat or water)	125	4	219	3	344	3
Housing assistance	277	8	452	7	729	7
TANF (public cash assistance, formerly called ADC or ADCF)	200	6	238	4	438	4
Child care assistance	147	4	183	3	330	3
SSI (supplemental security income)	98	3	135	2	233	2
SSDI (social security disability income)	67	2	120	2	187	2
Unemployment compensation or insurance	123	4	162	2	285	3
Veterans benefits	43	1	102	2	145	1
Other assistance	34	1	57	1	91	1
<b>HOUSING INSECURE</b>						
Any Assistance	2,802	67	4,601	62	7,403	64
Medicaid or public health insurance	2,114	51	3,431	46	5,545	48

**TABLE E-9. Use of Public Assistance by Basic Needs Insecurity Status\* (Figure 9) (continued)**

	Community College		Senior College		Overall System	
	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage
SNAP (food stamps)	898	22	1,297	17	2,195	19
Tax refunds (including EITC)	913	22	1,486	20	2,399	21
WIC (nutritional assistance for children and pregnant women)	276	7	363	5	639	6
Transportation assistance	378	9	328	4	706	6
Utility assistance (e.g., help paying for heat or water)	145	3	234	3	379	3
Housing assistance	304	7	483	6	787	7
TANF (public cash assistance, formerly called ADC or ADCF)	224	5	271	4	495	4
Child care assistance	177	4	205	3	382	3
SSI (supplemental security income)	108	3	157	2	265	2
SSDI (social security disability income)	83	2	133	2	216	2
Unemployment compensation or insurance	143	3	193	3	336	3
Veterans benefits	56	1	123	2	179	2
Other assistance	50	1	64	1	114	1
<b>HOMELESS</b>						
Any Assistance	824	70	1,121	61	1,945	65
Medicaid or public health insurance	647	55	823	45	1,470	49
SNAP (food stamps)	266	23	306	17	572	19
Tax refunds (including EITC)	250	21	368	20	618	21

**TABLE E-9. Use of Public Assistance by Basic Needs Insecurity Status\* (Figure 9) (continued)**

	Community College		Senior College		Overall System	
	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage
WIC (nutritional assistance for children and pregnant women)	85	7	86	5	171	6
Transportation assistance	133	11	99	5	232	8
Utility assistance (e.g., help paying for heat or water)	36	3	66	4	102	3
Housing assistance	105	9	141	8	246	8
TANF (public cash assistance, formerly called ADC or ADCF)	84	7	84	5	168	6
Child care assistance	58	5	59	3	117	4
SSI (supplemental security income)	26	2	40	2	66	2
SSDI (social security disability income)	28	2	38	2	66	2
Unemployment compensation or insurance	39	3	59	3	98	3
Veterans benefits	17	1	44	2	61	2
Other assistance	15	1	16	1	31	1
<b>SECURE</b>						
Any Assistance	936	56	2,284	47	3,220	49
Medicaid or public health insurance	698	42	1,830	37	2,528	39
SNAP (food stamps)	218	13	490	10	708	11
Tax refunds (including EITC)	227	14	524	11	751	11
WIC (nutritional assistance for children and pregnant women)	62	4	77	2	139	2
Transportation assistance	113	7	111	2	224	3

**TABLE E-9. Use of Public Assistance by Basic Needs Insecurity Status\* (Figure 9) (continued)**

	Community College		Senior College		Overall System	
	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage	Number of Students	Percentage
<b>Utility assistance (e.g., help paying for heat or water)</b>	20	1	61	1	81	1
<b>Housing assistance</b>	55	3	124	3	179	3
<b>TANF (public cash assistance, formerly called ADC or ADCF)</b>	35	2	38	1	73	1
<b>Child care assistance</b>	24	1	26	1	50	1
<b>SSI (supplemental security income)</b>	33	2	66	1	99	2
<b>SSDI (social security disability income)</b>	25	1	41	1	66	1
<b>Unemployment compensation or insurance</b>	31	2	51	1	82	1
<b>Veterans benefits</b>	27	2	54	1	81	1
<b>Other assistance</b>	10	1	21	0	31	0

\* Among CUNY survey respondents

Source: 2018 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: For more detail on how each measure of insecurity was constructed, see Appendix C. References to 0% reflect values less than 1%.



# Appendix F. Disparities in Rates of Basic Needs Insecurity

TABLE F-1. Rates of Basic Needs Insecurity by Demographic Background by College Level\*\*

	Community College				Senior College				Overall System			
	Number of Students	FI* (%)	HI* (%)	HM* (%)	Number of Students	FI* (%)	HI* (%)	HM* (%)	Number of Students	FI* (%)	HI* (%)	HM* (%)
<b>GENDER ORIENTATION</b>												
Male	1,693	53	61	21	3,966	44	50	15	5,659	47	53	17
Female	4,691	52	64	17	10,046	48	53	12	14,737	49	57	13
Transgender	29	66	62	55	67	67	57	25	96	67	58	34
Does not identify as female, male, or transgender	89	65	75	29	188	59	59	27	277	61	64	27
<b>SEXUAL ORIENTATION</b>												
Heterosexual or straight	5,243	52	63	17	11,801	45	51	12	17,044	47	55	13
Gay or lesbian	228	60	67	23	433	52	60	18	661	55	62	19
Bisexual	461	56	64	25	1,016	59	57	18	1,477	58	59	21
Is not sure or neither heterosexual, gay, lesbian, or bisexual	416	53	64	22	811	51	53	17	1,227	52	57	19
<b>RACIAL OR ETHNIC BACKGROUND</b>												
White or Caucasian	766	42	57	17	2,438	37	44	14	3,204	39	47	14
African American or Black	1,594	59	66	20	2,928	58	62	16	4,522	59	64	17
Hispanic or Latinx	2,703	56	65	16	4,854	52	57	12	7,557	53	59	13
American Indian or Alaskan Native	68	51	68	29	132	55	58	17	200	54	62	22
Middle Eastern or North African or Arab or Arab American	119	49	67	24	419	39	48	12	538	41	52	14
Southeast Asian	434	49	67	22	1,280	40	46	12	1,714	42	51	15
Pacific Islander or native Hawaiian	43	51	60	19	106	52	48	17	149	52	52	17

**TABLE F-1. Rates of Basic Needs Insecurity by Demographic Background by College Level\*\* (continued)**

	Community College				Senior College				Overall System			
	Number of Students	FI* (%)	HI* (%)	HM* (%)	Number of Students	FI* (%)	HI* (%)	HM* (%)	Number of Students	FI* (%)	HI* (%)	HM* (%)
<b>Other Asian or Asian American</b>	685	41	55	19	2,145	39	39	11	2,830	39	43	13
<b>Other</b>	269	57	66	22	655	47	59	17	924	50	61	18
<b>I prefer not to answer</b>	347	54	71	22	659	47	54	14	1,006	49	60	17
<b>STUDENT IS A U.S. CITIZEN OR PERMANENT RESIDENT</b>												
<b>Yes</b>	5,628	53	63	17	12,941	47	51	12	18,569	48	54	14
<b>No</b>	584	54	72	26	886	49	61	21	1,470	51	65	23
<b>Prefers not to answer</b>	207	46	60	21	308	46	58	12	515	46	59	15
<b>HIGHEST LEVEL OF PARENTAL EDUCATION</b>												
<b>No high school diploma</b>	1,458	57	67	17	2,835	49	56	12	4,293	52	59	14
<b>High school diploma</b>	1,557	51	60	19	2,812	47	48	11	4,369	48	52	14
<b>Some college</b>	2,114	58	68	20	4,829	50	57	14	6,943	53	60	16
<b>Bachelor's degree or greater</b>	918	41	58	15	3,004	38	44	13	3,922	39	47	13
<b>Does not know</b>	470	45	56	17	791	45	48	12	1,261	45	51	14
<b>AGE</b>												
<b>18 to 20</b>	1,925	43	46	16	5,509	40	37	9	7,434	41	39	11
<b>21 to 25</b>	2,230	56	68	21	5,302	49	54	15	7,532	51	58	17
<b>26 to 30</b>	1,079	58	75	21	1,543	58	75	20	2,622	58	75	20
<b>Older than 30</b>	1,248	56	74	15	1,848	51	72	12	3,096	53	73	13

\*\* Among CUNY survey respondents

\* FI stands for the rate of food insecurity; HI stands for the rate of housing insecurity; and HM stands for the rate of homelessness.

Source: 2018 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: The Number of Students column indicates the number of survey respondents to 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. Classifications of gender orientation and racial/ethnic background are not mutually exclusive. Students could self-identify with multiple classifications.

**TABLE F-2. Rates of Basic Needs Insecurity by Student Life Experiences and College Level\*\***

	Community College				Senior College				Overall System			
	Number of Students	FI* (%)	HI* (%)	HM* (%)	Number of Students	FI* (%)	HI* (%)	HM* (%)	Number of Students	FI* (%)	HI* (%)	HM* (%)
<b>COLLEGE ENROLLMENT STATUS</b>												
Full-time (at least 12 credits)	4,998	52	63	19	11,919	46	49	13	16,917	48	53	15
Part-time (fewer than 12 credits)	1,620	54	66	16	2,619	48	63	12	4,239	50	64	14
<b>YEARS IN COLLEGE</b>												
Less than 1	2,175	50	62	20	2,912	40	40	11	5,087	45	49	15
1 to 2	3,030	53	63	18	4,039	45	48	12	7,069	49	55	14
3 or more	1,406	55	67	16	7,568	50	58	14	8,974	51	59	14
<b>DEPENDENCY STATUS</b>												
Dependent	2,028	47	53	15	7,049	42	42	10	9,077	43	44	11
Independent	4,421	56	69	20	7,101	51	62	15	11,522	53	65	17
<b>STUDENT RECEIVES THE PELL GRANT</b>												
Yes	3,532	56	64	18	8,371	49	53	12	11,903	51	57	14
No	3,086	48	62	18	6,167	43	50	13	9,253	45	54	15
<b>STUDENT HAS CHILDREN</b>												
Yes	1,317	63	74	17	2,406	54	64	13	3,723	57	67	14
No	5,284	50	61	18	12,078	45	50	13	17,362	47	53	14
<b>RELATIONSHIP STATUS</b>												
Single	3,951	53	61	19	9,254	46	49	13	13,205	48	52	15
In a relationship	1,498	52	64	18	3,476	50	53	13	4,974	51	56	15
Married or domestic partnership	930	50	70	13	1,324	43	67	11	2,254	46	68	12
Divorced	118	65	86	20	169	60	76	14	287	62	80	17
Widowed	11	64	73	9	16	56	75	19	27	59	74	15

**TABLE F-2. Rates of Basic Needs Insecurity by Student Life Experiences and College Level\*\* (continued)**

	Community College				Senior College				Overall System			
	Number of Students	FI* (%)	HI* (%)	HM* (%)	Number of Students	FI* (%)	HI* (%)	HM* (%)	Number of Students	FI* (%)	HI* (%)	HM* (%)
<b>STUDENT HAS BEEN IN FOSTER CARE</b>												
Yes	180	73	74	34	216	67	70	27	396	70	72	30
No	6,320	52	63	18	14,025	46	52	13	20,345	48	55	14
<b>STUDENT SERVED IN THE MILITARY</b>												
Yes	120	44	62	27	237	49	61	23	357	47	61	24
No	6,388	53	64	18	14,007	47	52	13	20,395	49	55	14
<b>EMPLOYMENT STATUS</b>												
Employed	3,746	57	71	19	8,820	52	59	15	12,566	53	62	16
Not employed, looking for work	1,506	52	58	18	3,038	46	44	11	4,544	48	49	13
Not employed, not looking for work	1,136	37	44	12	2,301	29	33	7	3,437	32	37	9
<b>STUDENT HAS BEEN CONVICTED OF A CRIME</b>												
Yes	47	64	77	30	61	61	82	51	108	62	80	42
No	6,393	52	63	18	14,169	47	52	12	20,562	48	55	14
Prefers not to answer	121	65	71	29	135	58	65	25	256	61	68	27
<b>DISABILITY OR MEDICAL CONDITION</b>												
Learning disability (dyslexia, etc.)	298	55	60	21	403	55	60	22	701	55	60	21
Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)	257	63	68	28	570	55	61	23	827	58	63	24
Autism spectrum disorder	48	52	58	25	85	53	52	20	133	53	54	22
Physical disability (speech, sight, mobility, hearing, etc.)	275	62	69	26	506	54	61	17	781	57	64	20

**TABLE F-2. Rates of Basic Needs Insecurity by Student Life Experiences and College Level\*\* (continued)**

	Community College				Senior College				Overall System			
	Number of Students	FI* (%)	HI* (%)	HM* (%)	Number of Students	FI* (%)	HI* (%)	HM* (%)	Number of Students	FI* (%)	HI* (%)	HM* (%)
<b>Chronic illness (asthma, diabetes, autoimmune disorder, cancer, etc.)</b>	643	61	70	22	1,308	54	63	18	1,951	56	65	19
<b>Psychological disorder (depression, anxiety, etc.)</b>	1,183	63	71	26	2,700	59	60	20	3,883	60	64	22
<b>Other</b>	187	60	72	24	303	59	61	24	490	60	66	24
<b>No disability or medical condition</b>	4,522	50	62	16	10,001	43	49	11	14,523	45	53	12

\*\* Among CUNY survey respondents

\* FI stands for the rate of food insecurity; HI stands for the rate of housing insecurity; and HM stands for the rate of homelessness.

Source: 2018 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: The Number of Students column indicates the number of survey respondents to our measure of homelessness. 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.

## Appendix G. Comparing Measures of Homelessness

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' homelessness status and compared those results with the indirect measures assessing their actual experiences (described in Appendix C). As shown in Table G, when asked if they ever experienced homelessness in the past year, the majority of students who said “yes” also reported couch surfing (72%) or sleeping in a location used to classify students as homeless (90%). However, among students who reported couch surfing in the past year—a considerably greater number of students than those who said they had been homeless (1,153 versus 632)—only 40% self-identified as experiencing homelessness. Similarly, only 20% who reported sleeping in a location used to classify students as homeless also self-identified as experiencing homelessness.

**TABLE G. Comparisons of Homelessness Measures**

	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Percentage self-identified homeless (%)</b>	<b>Percentage ever couch surfed (%)</b>	<b>Percentage experienced location-based homelessness (%)</b>
<b>AMONG RESPONDENTS WHO:</b>				
<b>Self-identified homeless</b>	632	100	72	90
<b>Ever couch surfed</b>	1,153	40	100	86
<b>Experienced location-based homelessness</b>	2,864	20	35	100

Source: 2018 #RealCollege surveys

Note: The first row refers to students who responded “Yes” to the following question: “In the past 12 months have you been homeless?” The second row refers to students who responded “Yes” to the following question: “In the past 12 months, did you couch surf—that is moved from one temporary housing arrangement to another because you had no other place to live?” The last row, experienced location-based homelessness, reflects the students who reported sleeping in any of the following locations in the past 12 months: at a shelter; in a camper; temporarily staying with a relative, friend, or couch surfing; temporarily at a hotel or motel; in transitional housing or independent living program; at a group home; at a treatment center; outdoor location; in a closed area/space with a roof not meant for human habitation.



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## Endnotes

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9 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.

10 Although assessments of basic needs insecurity made early in the fall semester are likely to capture more students, these assessments may also understate students' basic needs. In fact, Bruening et al. (2018) surveyed the same population at the beginning and at the end of a semester and found that rates of food insecurity were higher at the end of the semester (35%) than at the beginning (28%).

11 The estimated number of survey invitations is based on the total number of undergraduates at participating institutions in the fall of 2017, as reported by the National Center for Education Statistics' Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. Fall 2017 enrollment numbers for the Professional Studies program were gathered from the CUNY Office of Institutional Research's website. According to the OIRA's preliminary reporting, 244,118 undergraduates were enrolled at participating institutions in fall 2018. They also note that only 215,440 students were surveyed due to missing or invalid email addresses and other issues.

12 See [https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/about/sipp-content-information.html#par\\_textimage\\_5](https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/about/sipp-content-information.html#par_textimage_5)

13 Crutchfield, R. M. & Maguire, J. (2017). *Researching basic needs in higher education: Qualitative and quantitative instruments to explore a holistic understanding of food and housing insecurity*. Long Beach, California: Basic Needs Initiative, Office of the Chancellor, California State University.