



For College, Community, and Justice

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# The State University of New York #RealCollege Survey Report

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May 2020

## Executive Summary

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Now in its fifth year, the #RealCollege survey is the nation's largest, longest-running annual assessment of basic needs security among college students. In the absence of any federal data on the subject, the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice created the survey to evaluate access to affordable food and housing among college students.

This report describes the results of the #RealCollege survey administered in the fall of 2019 at 33 of the 64 State University of New York (SUNY) colleges and universities, a subset of the 227 institutions surveyed across the United States.

In 2019, approximately 18,280 SUNY students from 18 two-year colleges and 15 four-year colleges and universities responded to the #RealCollege survey. The results indicate:

- 36% of respondents were food insecure in the prior 30 days
- 37% of respondents were housing insecure in the previous year
- 16% of respondents were homeless in the previous year

Compared to students attending two-year colleges elsewhere in the country, students surveyed in SUNY's two-year colleges experience a similar rate of food insecurity, a lower rate of housing insecurity, and a similar rate of homelessness. Among the four-year SUNY students surveyed, rates of food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness are lower than national rates.<sup>1</sup> However, the rates of basic needs insecurity among SUNY students are still substantial.

There is wide variation in rates of basic needs insecurity across SUNY institutions. As is true nationwide, basic needs insecurity continues to be more common for students attending two-year colleges than those attending four-year colleges. Students often marginalized in higher education are at greater risk of basic needs insecurity while attending SUNY colleges and universities. These groups include students identifying as Indigenous; Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian; Black; or American Indian or Alaska Native. Other groups at higher risk are students identifying as transgender or non-binary and students who are former foster youth or returning citizens.

Rates of public benefits utilization at SUNY colleges and universities are similar to the rates we observe for colleges nationwide. Our findings highlight the need for continued evolution of programmatic work to advance cultural shifts on college campuses, increased engagement with community organizations and the private sector, more robust emergency aid programs, and a basic needs-centered approach to government policy at all levels.

## Introduction

Most colleges and universities are striving to build enrollment and increase college completion rates. Their efforts include changes to student advising practices, the structure of academic programs and teaching, and the strategic use of scholarships. But until recently, few institutions identified basic needs insecurity as a significant challenge keeping students from obtaining credentials. In 2018, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report on food insecurity among college students stating that “increasing evidence indicates that some college students are experiencing food insecurity, which can negatively impact their academic success.” The GAO concluded that the “substantial federal investment in higher education is at risk if college students drop out because they cannot afford basic necessities like food.”<sup>2</sup>

The #RealCollege survey is one of 31 studies the GAO reviewed for its report. It assists college administrators, trustees, staff, faculty, and students, along with community partners, policymakers, and advocates, in understanding the prevalence and correlates of food and housing insecurity on college campuses across the nation. The report provides the most up-to-date evidence, and this year’s report includes other key factors affecting basic needs insecurity, including transportation and childcare. The data provide ample reason to center efforts to address students’ basic needs as institutions seek to become “student-ready” colleges where degree completion is common.<sup>3</sup>

Supporting students’ basic needs has many benefits for colleges and universities, especially in today’s difficult economic climate. Here are five key reasons why institutions are doing #RealCollege work. Addressing #RealCollege issues:

1. Boosts academic performance, helping the institution and its students retain federal financial aid. It also promotes retention and degree completion, helping the institution generate more tuition dollars and improving outcomes about which legislators care.
2. Reduces the barriers that returning adults face, boosting enrollment.
3. Makes the jobs of faculty and staff easier, as students are more able to focus on learning.
4. Creates bridges between the institution and community organizations, bringing new relationships and resources to bear. It also creates a productive opportunity for the private sector to engage with the institution to help create the graduates that everyone wants to hire.
5. Generates new philanthropic giving and creates opportunities to engage alumni who do not have much but will happily contribute to emergency aid.

There are many paths to implementing programs and policies to support students’ basic needs, several of which are listed at the conclusion of this report. The Hope Center strongly recommends focusing on prevention, rather than only responding to emergencies, and finds that systemic reforms are far more effective than one-time solutions.

New York State has taken steps to address campus food insecurity. In 2018, Governor Andrew Cuomo’s No Student Goes Hungry initiative mandated that all SUNY colleges and universities establish a food pantry on or in affiliation with their campus. Later that year, SUNY formed a Food Insecurity Task Force that worked with the state Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, Hunger Solutions New York, and other local partners to meet the governor’s requirement. The group also supported students who qualified for SNAP benefits, including education and outreach, pre-screening, and application assistance.

From March through May 2019, the SUNY System Administration surveyed 6,618 students from four-year colleges and 4,527 students from community colleges. The [findings](#) reveal:

- 54% of community college students and 41% of four-year students indicated that they were hungry but did not eat because they did not have enough money for food.
- 45% of community college students and 33% of four-year students indicated that they were unable to study or focus because they were hungry and could not afford food.

In addition, the SUNY System Administration’s Food Insecurity Task Force estimated that in 2019:

- More than 145,000 visits were made to food pantries located on or partnered with SUNY’s state-operated colleges, with an average of 4,700 visits per pantry.
- About 171,000 visits were made to food pantries located on or partnered with SUNY’s community colleges, with an average of 5,700 visits per pantry.

The Task Force also made a series of recommendations to campuses for 2020, including:

- Begin working with auxiliary services to establish meal swipe donation programs
- Expand SNAP and WIC pre-screening & application assistance services on campuses
- Train designated campus coordinators on SNAP rules for college students
- Prioritize work-study slots for low-income students
- Train campus health offices to spot signs of food insecurity
- Create interactive, online maps for locating campus food assistance providers
- Assess campus communications to improve outreach
- Update enrollment/registration documents to include data that would trigger early alerts for students who may need intervention/assistance for food, housing, or mental health issues

Later this year, the federal government will—for the first time—begin assessing food and housing insecurity among students with the National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey, a step the Hope Center has long advocated. In addition, numerous other organizations have begun including similar assessments in their surveys, including the [Trellis Financial Wellness Survey](#), the [Community College Survey of Student Engagement](#) (survey questions now in the pilot stage), the [ACHA-National College Health Assessment](#), and the [CIRP Freshman Survey](#). In addition, some colleges and universities are integrating basic needs insecurity assessments into their early warning systems and institutional surveys. The Hope Center is heartened by this response and continues to provide technical support in several ways, including the publication of a [guide](#) for assessment tools.

## 2019 Findings Overview

This report presents findings from the 2019 #RealCollege survey on basic needs of students in SUNY colleges and universities. Section 1 presents the overall rates of basic needs insecurity across all survey respondents. Section 2 shows disparate 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 students' utilization of public assistance and on-campus supports. Section 5 contains concluding remarks and recommendations.

For more information on 2019 survey participants and methodologies used for this report, refer to the [web appendices](#).

### THE DATA

The data in this report were gathered using an online survey fielded to all enrolled students at participating colleges and universities. Colleges distributed the online survey to more than 218,400 enrolled students, yielding an estimated response rate of 8.4%, or approximately 18,280 total student participants. For more information on how the survey was fielded and a discussion of how representative the results are, refer to the [web appendices](#).

**The following SUNY colleges and universities participated in the fall 2019 #RealCollege survey:**

#### Two-year colleges

- Alfred State College
- Cayuga Community College
- Dutchess Community College
- Fashion Institute of Technology
- Finger Lakes Community College
- Hudson Valley Community College
- Jamestown Community College
- Mohawk Valley Community College
- Monroe Community College
- Nassau Community College
- Onondaga Community College
- SUNY Adirondack
- SUNY Corning Community College
- SUNY Delhi
- SUNY Erie Community College
- SUNY Morrisville
- SUNY Orange
- Westchester Community College

#### Four-year colleges

- SUNY Cobleskill
- SUNY College Old Westbury
- SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry
- SUNY Cortland
- SUNY Empire State College
- SUNY Fredonia
- SUNY Maritime College
- SUNY New Paltz
- SUNY Oneonta
- SUNY Oswego
- SUNY Polytechnic Institute
- SUNY Potsdam
- SUNY Upstate Medical University
- Stony Brook University
- The College at Brockport

## 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.

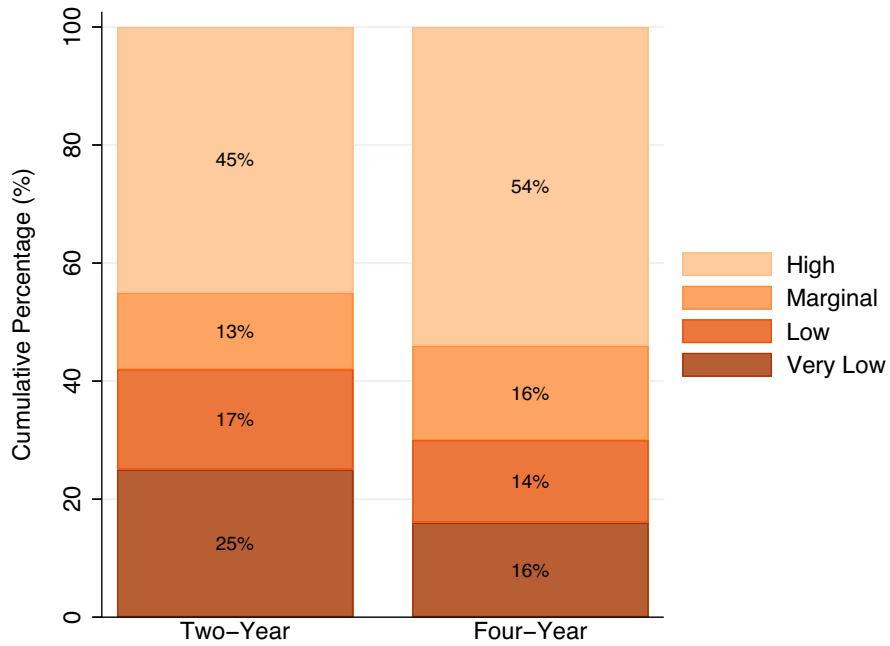
### FOOD INSECURITY

**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. The survey assesses food security among students using the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) 18-item set of questions.<sup>4</sup>

How prevalent is food insecurity among survey respondents at SUNY colleges and universities? During the 30 days preceding the survey, approximately 42% of survey respondents attending two-year institutions experienced food insecurity, with 17% assessed at the low level and 25% at the very low level of food security (Figure 1). Approximately 30% of survey respondents attending four-year institutions experienced food insecurity, with 14% assessed at the low level and 16% at the very low level of food security. About one in three respondents attending two-year institutions ran short on food, and 28% said that they went hungry, compared to 26% and 19% of respondents at four-year institutions, respectively (Figure 2).

It is notable that compared to the spring 2019 SUNY survey, the 2019 #RealCollege survey finds lower rates of students who said they were hungry but did not eat because they lacked money. Specifically, the SUNY survey estimates the prevalence of the problem at 54% among community colleges, whereas the #RealCollege survey estimate is 28%. Similarly, the SUNY survey estimates that 41% of students at four-year colleges face that problem, whereas our estimate is 19%. The difference between estimates may be due to how the two surveys were administered. The SUNY survey was presented as a “Food Access” survey, which may have attracted students who were more likely to be dealing with food challenges, yielding higher rates of reported food insecurity. The #RealCollege survey is designed to avoid disproportionately engaging students experiencing basic needs insecurity. Another possibility is higher rates of food challenges among institutions that participated in the SUNY survey, but did not participate in the #RealCollege survey. Lastly, time frame is a potential factor. It is possible that rates of food challenges were higher when the SUNY survey was administered between March and May 2019 compared to the #RealCollege Survey, fielded August through October 2019. It is highly unlikely that these differences are due to increased access to food pantries or SNAP (Figures 9 and 10).

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



Source: 2019 #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, refer to the [web appendices](#). Cumulative percentages may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.



**FIGURE 2. Food Insecurity Among SUNY Survey Respondents**

Two-Year (%)		Four-Year (%)
44	I couldn't afford to eat balanced meals.	35
43	I worried whether my food would run out before I got money to buy more.	34
36	The food that I bought did not last and I did not have the money to buy more.	26
36	I cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there was not enough money for food.	25
33	I ate less than I felt I should because there was not enough money for food.	23
28	I was hungry but did not eat because there was not enough money for food.	19
25	I cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there was not enough money for food (3 or more times).	16
17	I lost weight because there was not enough money for food.	11
11	I did not eat for a whole day because there was not enough money for food.	6
7	I did not eat for a whole day because there was not enough money for food (3 or more times).	3

Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: For more details on the food security module used in this report, refer to the [web appendices](#).

## HOUSING INSECURITY AND HOMELESSNESS

**Housing insecurity** includes a broad set of housing challenges that prevent someone from having a safe, affordable, and consistent place to live. Housing insecurity among students was assessed with a nine-item set of questions the Hope Center developed, which looks at factors such as the ability to pay rent or utilities and the need to move frequently. The data show that many students are more likely to suffer some form of housing insecurity than to have all their needs met during college.



Among survey respondents at SUNY colleges and universities, 44% at two-year institutions and 30% at four-year institutions experienced housing insecurity in the past 12 months (Figure 3). The most commonly reported challenge is being unable to pay the full amount of rent or mortgage (19% of students at two-year institutions and 10% at four-year institutions). Seven percent of survey respondents at two-year institutions and 5% at four-year institutions left their household because they felt unsafe.

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

Two-Year (%)		Four-Year (%)
44	Any item	30
19	Did not pay full amount of rent or mortgage	10
18	Did not pay full amount of utilities	8
16	Had a rent or mortgage increase that made it difficult to pay	11
15	Had an account default or go into collections	6
14	Moved in with people due to financial problems	9
9	Lived with others beyond the expected capacity of the housing	6
7	Left household because felt unsafe	5
3	Moved three or more times	3
2	Received a summons to appear in housing court	1

Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: For more details on the housing insecurity module used in this report, refer to the [web appendices](#).

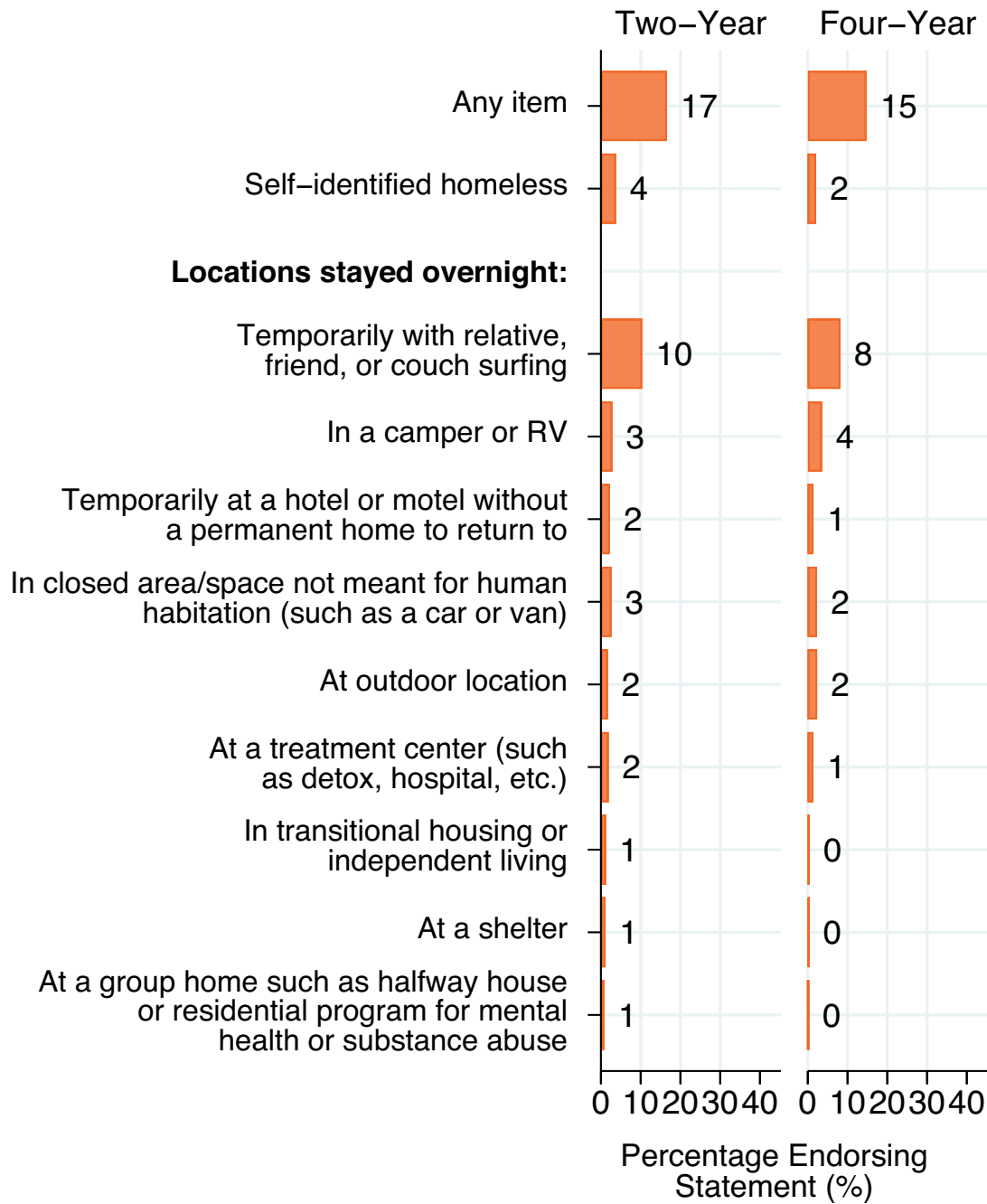
## HOUSING INSECURITY AND HOMELESSNESS

**Homelessness** means that a person does not have a fixed, regular, and adequate 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. California State University researchers developed the tool used in this report to assess homelessness. Using an inclusive definition of homelessness that lets respondents self-identify both their status and living condition allows more students to receive the support they need, as well as aligning with the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.<sup>6</sup> A recent Brookings Institution study of K-12 students found that “academic outcomes for doubled-up homeless students and other homeless students are almost indistinguishable from one another.”<sup>7</sup>

How prevalent is homelessness? Homelessness affected 17% of SUNY survey respondents at two-year institutions and 15% at four-year institutions (Figure 4). Four percent of respondents at two-year institutions self-identified as homeless; 13% experienced homelessness but did not self-identify as homeless. Two percent of respondents at four-year institutions self-identified as homeless; 13% experienced homelessness but did not self-identify as homeless. The vast majority of students who experienced homelessness temporarily stay with a relative or friend, or couch surf.



**FIGURE 4. Homelessness Among SUNY Survey Respondents**



Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

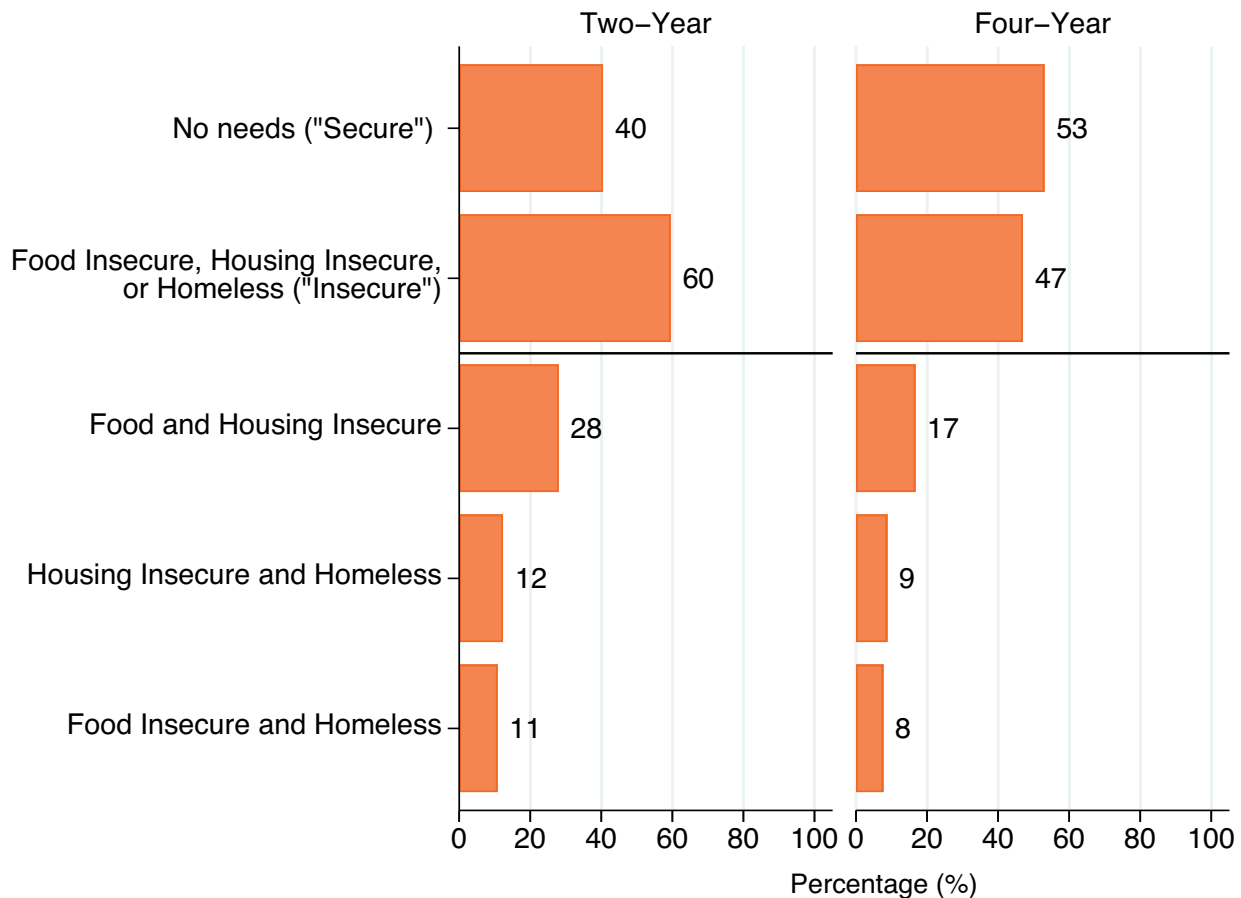
Notes: For more details on the homelessness module used in this report, refer to the [web appendices](#).

## OVERLAPPING CHALLENGES

Students often experience basic needs insecurity in one or more forms, either simultaneously or over time. Students' overlapping challenges in the data demonstrate that basic needs insecurities are fluid and interconnected.

Among SUNY students responding to the survey, 60% at two-year institutions experienced food insecurity, housing insecurity, or homelessness during the previous year, whereas 47% of four-year students did (Figure 5). Twenty-eight percent of respondents from two-year institutions and 17% from four-year institutions were both food and housing insecure in the past year.

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



Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

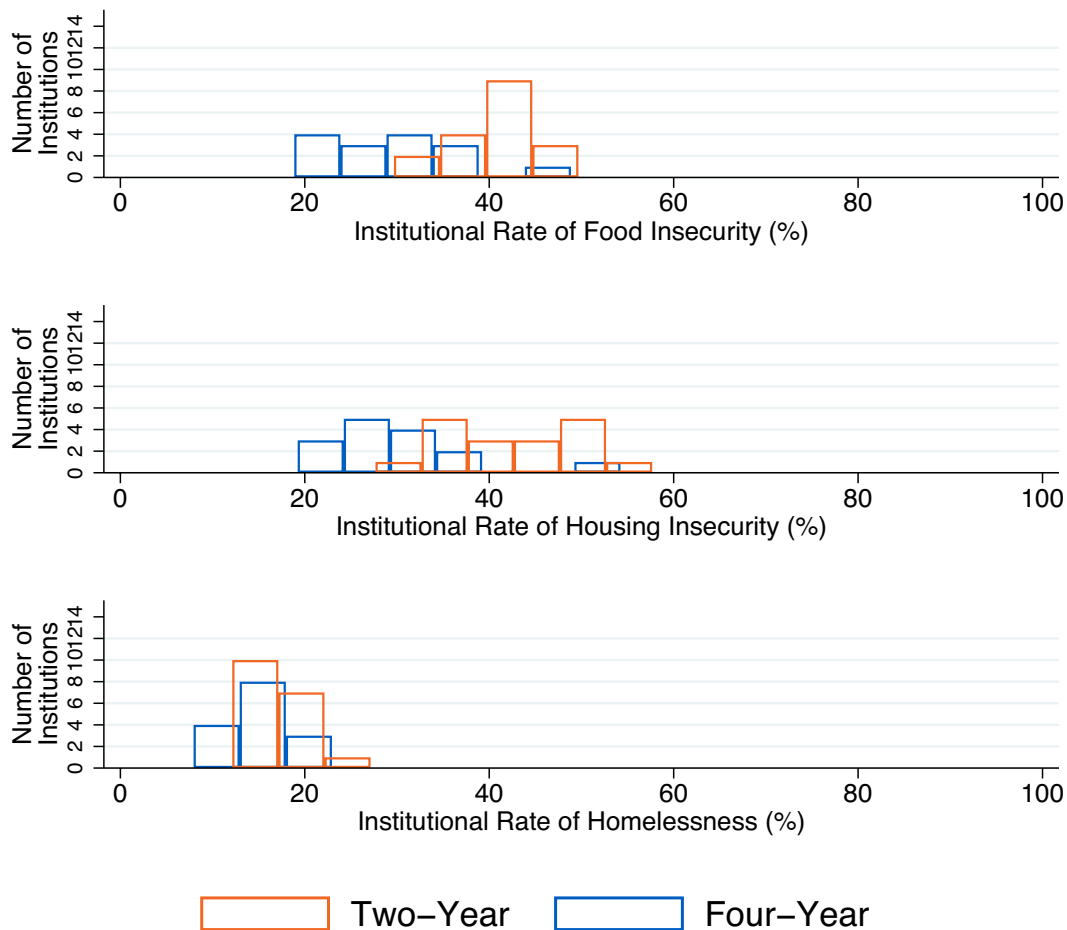
Notes: For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, refer to the [web appendices](#).

## VARIATION BY INSTITUTION

Rates of basic needs insecurity vary not only in type and severity among students, but across institutions as well (Figure 6). There is wide variation in rates of basic needs insecurity across SUNY colleges and universities. This variation could be attributed to a number of factors, including regional differences across the state. Of the participating institutions, the majority are located in towns or suburbs. About one in five are located in cities (including one institution in New York City), and the small remainder are located in rural areas.

Institution-level rates of food insecurity mainly range between 35% and 45% at two-year institutions and between 23% and 37% at four-year institutions. Rates of housing insecurity vary widely across institutions as well: generally, from 35% to 49% of students attending two-year institutions experienced housing insecurity, as did from 23% to 37% of students attending four-year institutions. Institution-level rates of student homelessness mainly range between 14% and 20% at two-year institutions and between 11% and 19% at four-year institutions.

**FIGURE 6. Variation in Institutional Rates of Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity, and Homelessness Among SUNY Colleges and Universities**



Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, refer to the [web appendices](#).

## SECTION 2: Disparities in Basic Needs

The Hope Center’s prior work, as well as that of others, has consistently found that some students are at higher risk of basic needs insecurity than others.<sup>8</sup> This section highlights disparities in basic needs insecurity by student demographic, academic, and economic characteristics, as well as their life circumstances. Below we highlight several ways in which basic needs insecurity differs.

For more on demographic disparities and additional tables with information on survey participants, refer to the [web appendices](#).

Racial and ethnic disparities are evident. For example, White students have lower rates of food insecurity (32%) as compared to their peers; rates of food insecurity are higher among Indigenous (57%), Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian (54%), Black (53%), and American Indian or Alaska Native (51%) students (Table 1). Rates of housing insecurity and homelessness have similar patterns across groups.

**TABLE 1. Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurities, By Race and Ethnicity, Among SUNY Survey Respondents**

	Number of Students	Food Insecurity (%)	Housing Insecurity (%)	Homelessness (%)
<b>Racial or Ethnic Background</b>				
American Indian or Alaska Native	369	51	54	22
Black	1,973	53	50	18
Hispanic or Latinx	2,156	47	47	17
Indigenous	197	57	56	27
Middle Eastern or North African or Arab or Arab American	313	39	47	21
Other Asian or Asian American	779	35	32	14
Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian	97	54	47	24
Southeast Asian	500	40	37	15
White	10,032	32	34	16
Other	362	43	50	20
Prefer not to answer	212	43	48	25

Source: 2019 #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. Classifications of racial or ethnic background are not mutually exclusive. Students could self-identify with multiple classifications. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, see [web appendices](#).

The rate of housing insecurity for students attending college part-time is 49%, approximately 14 percentage points higher than the rate for those attending full-time. Students who have spent more than three years in college are more likely to experience housing insecurity than those who have been in college for less than one year (Table 2).

**TABLE 2. Enrollment Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurities Among SUNY Survey Respondents**

	Number of Students	Food Insecurity (%)	Housing Insecurity (%)	Homelessness (%)
<b>College Enrollment Status</b>				
Full-time (at least 12 credits)	13,318	36	35	16
Part-time (fewer than 12 credits)	2,372	36	49	14
<b>Level of Study</b>				
Undergraduate	13,242	37	37	16
Graduate	1,946	33	40	16
Non-degree	488	34	44	14
<b>Years in College</b>				
Less than 1	4,767	32	32	16
1 to 2	5,412	38	37	15
Three or more	5,511	38	42	16

Source: 2019 #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 details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, see [web appendices](#).



Students' basic needs insecurity varies with respect to their gender identity and sexual orientation (Table 3). Food insecurity and housing insecurity are lowest for male students; transgender and non-binary students have the highest rates of food and housing insecurity as well as homelessness.

**TABLE 3. Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurities, By Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation, Among SUNY Survey Respondents**

	Number of Students	Food Insecurity (%)	Housing Insecurity (%)	Homelessness (%)
<b>Gender Identity</b>				
Female	9,724	39	40	15
Male	4,113	30	31	17
Non-binary/Third gender	255	55	51	27
Self-describe	109	46	49	27
Transgender	199	56	54	28
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>				
Heterosexual	10,799	33	36	14
Gay or Lesbian	570	47	46	21
Bisexual	1,713	48	46	23
Self-describe	523	44	44	22

Source: 2019 #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. Classifications of gender identity are not mutually exclusive. Students could self-identify with multiple classifications. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, see [web appendices](#).





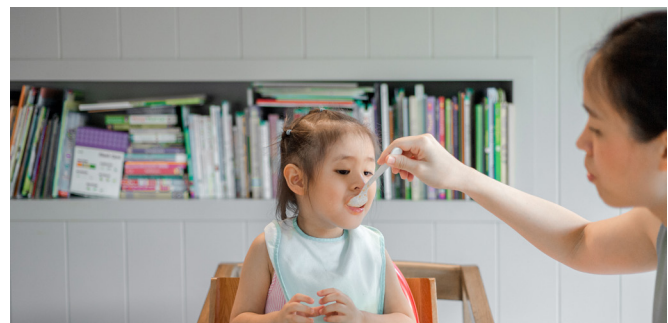
In addition, particular life circumstances are associated with a higher-than-average risk of basic needs insecurity. Parenting students, former foster youth, students who have served in the military, and returning citizens are more likely to experience basic needs insecurity than their peers (Table 4). For example, 52% of parenting students experience food insecurity and 65% experience housing insecurity—rates of insecurity far higher than their peers without children, who experience both food and housing insecurity at a rate of 34%. Nearly one third of returning citizens and former foster youth experience homelessness, more than double the overall rate (16%).

**TABLE 4. Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurities, By Student Experience, Among SUNY Survey Respondents**

	Number of Students	Food Insecurity (%)	Housing Insecurity (%)	Homelessness (%)
<b>Parenting Student</b>				
Yes	1,748	52	65	16
No	13,460	34	34	16
<b>Student Has Been in Foster Care</b>				
Yes	312	57	65	33
No	13,687	35	37	16
<b>Student Served in the Military</b>				
Yes	306	40	52	22
No	13,718	36	37	16
<b>Student is a Returning Citizen</b>				
Yes	308	58	69	32
No	14,263	35	36	15

Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

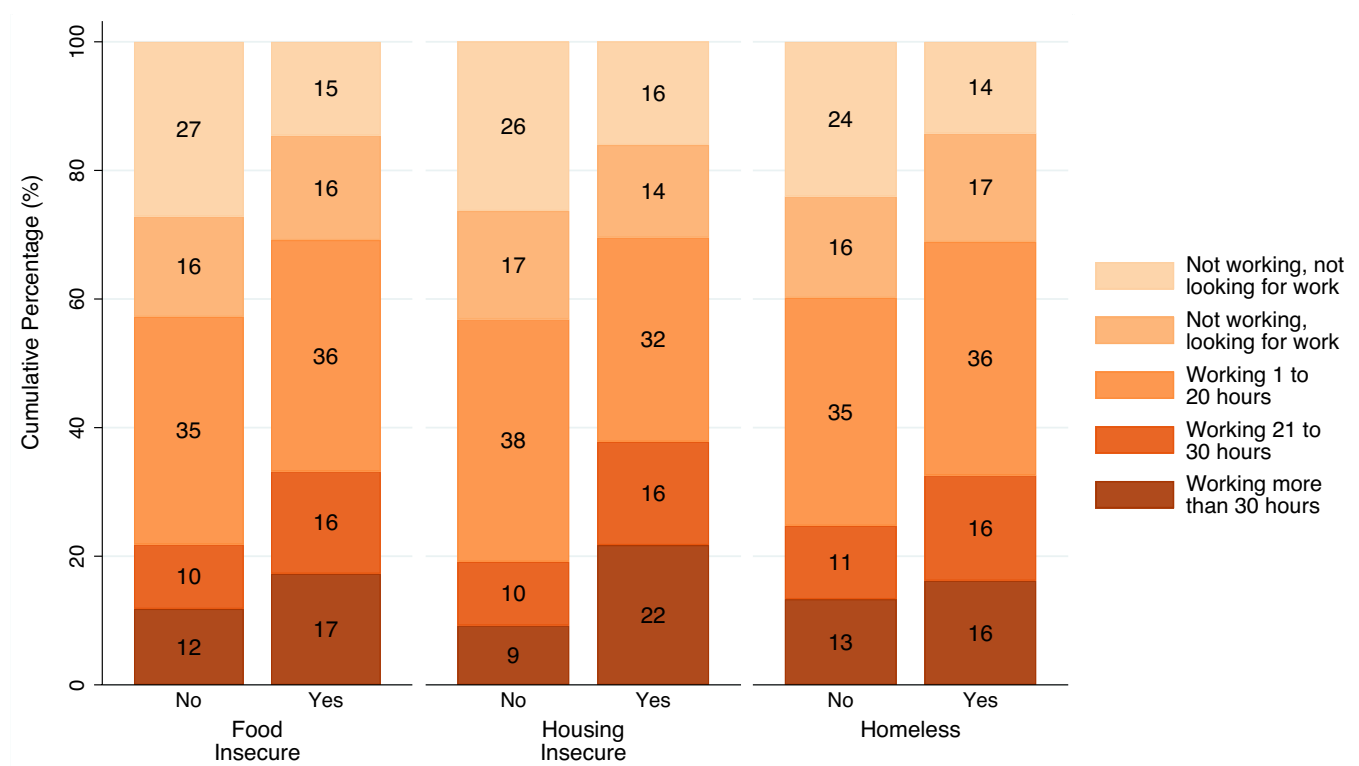
Notes: The “Number of Students” column indicates the number of survey respondents to our measure of homelessness. The number of survey respondents for our measures of food insecurity and housing insecurity may vary slightly. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, see [web appendices](#).



## SECTION 3: Employment and Academic Performance

Students who experience basic needs insecurity are overwhelmingly active participants in the labor force. The majority (69%) of students who experience food insecurity, housing insecurity, or homelessness are employed (Figure 7). Among working students, those who experience basic food or housing insecurity often work more hours than other students.

**FIGURE 7. Employment Behavior, By Basic Need Insecurity Status, Among SUNY Survey Respondents**

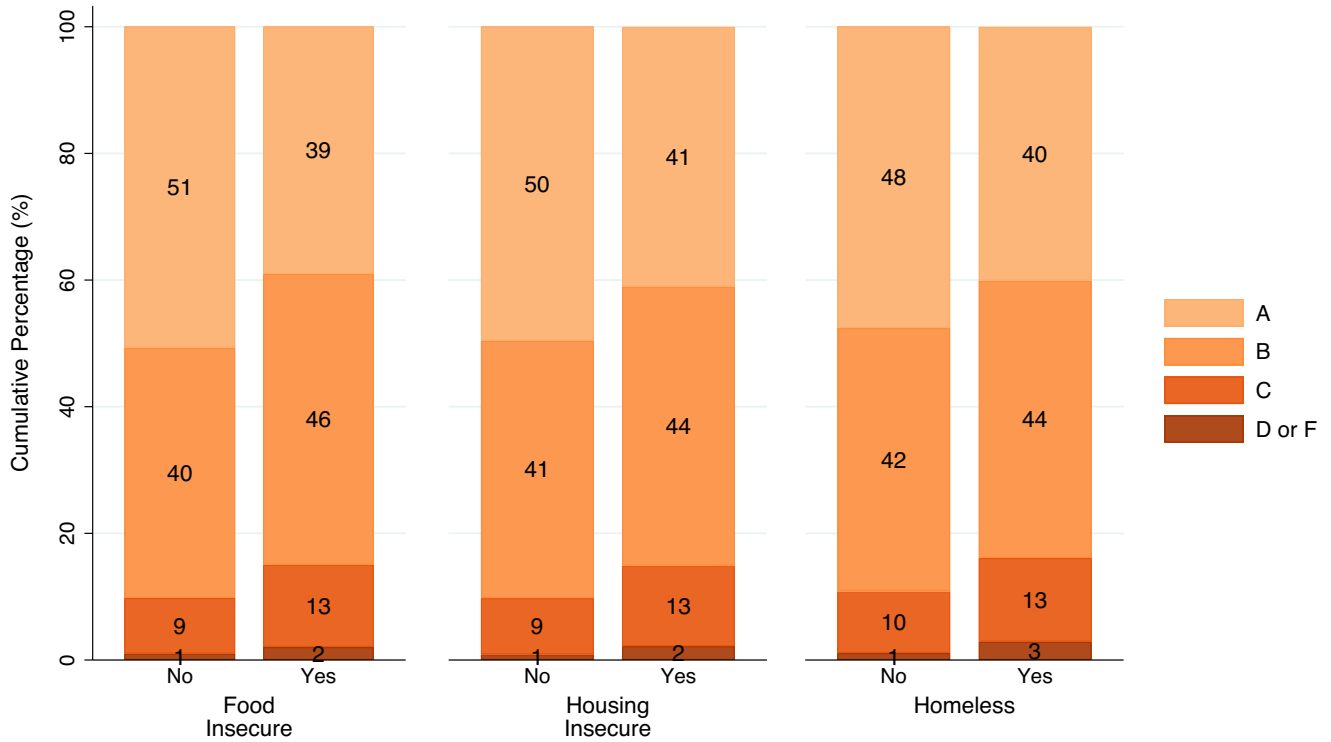


Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Cumulative percentages may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding. Survey questions about work status and number of hours worked were administered to a subset of randomly selected respondents. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, refer to the [web appendices](#).

While most students report receiving A's and B's, students who experience food insecurity, housing insecurity, or homelessness more often report grades of C or below than students who do not face these challenges (Figure 8).

**FIGURE 8. Self-Reported Grades, By Basic Need Insecurity Status, Among SUNY Survey Respondents**



Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Cumulative percentages may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, refer to the [web appendices](#).

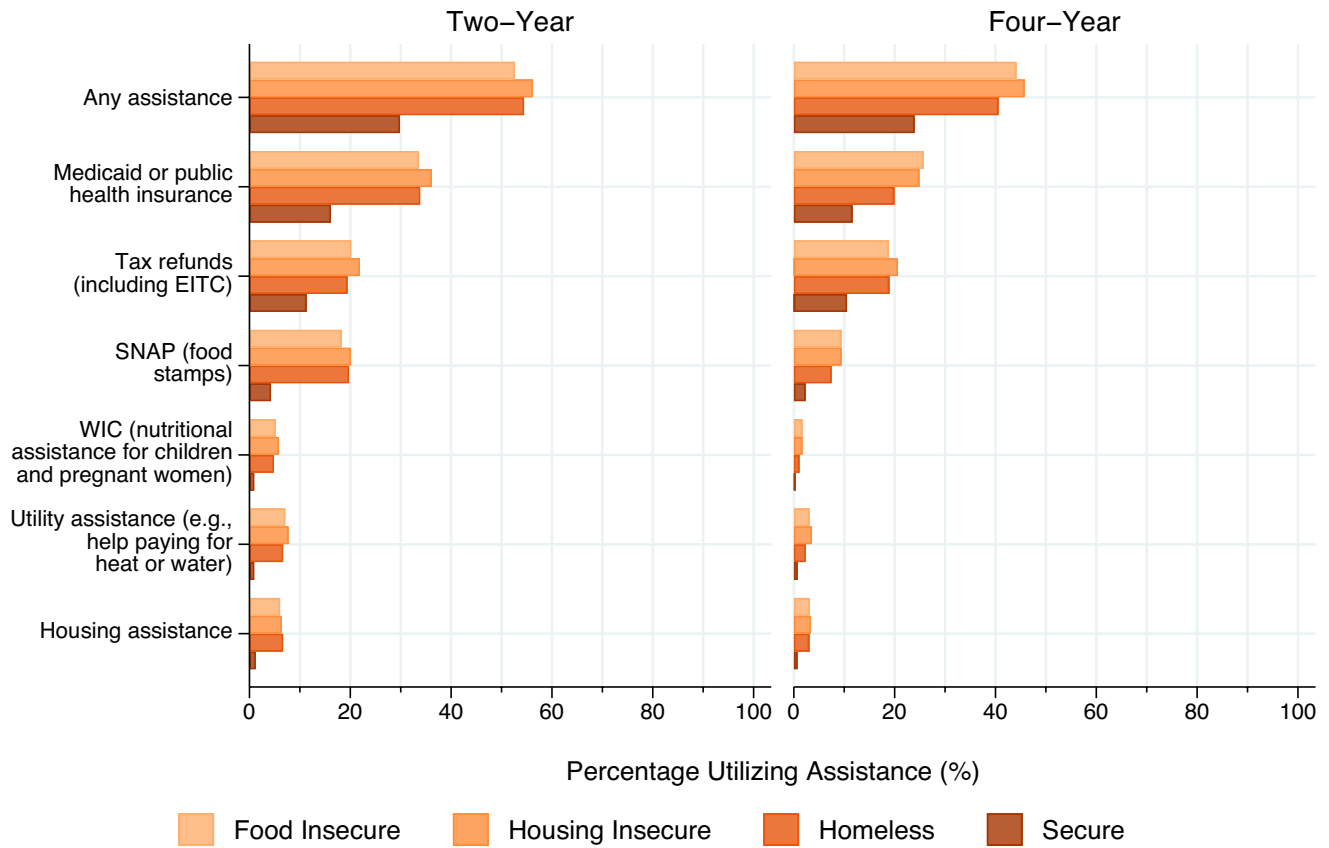


## SECTION 4: Utilization of Supports

While supports for students exist on the federal, state, and college levels, results continue to show that many students who experience basic needs insecurity do not access them (Figure 9).<sup>9</sup> Medicaid or public health insurance, tax refunds, and SNAP are the benefits used most often by SUNY students surveyed, though they remain quite low given the needs of students responding. For example, 18% of food insecure students across two-year institutions receive SNAP benefits, while only 9% of four-year students do. Likewise, only 6% of students attending two-year institutions and 3% of four-year students who experience housing insecurity receive housing assistance. Thirty-four percent of students attending two-year institutions who experience homelessness utilized Medicaid or public health insurance, while only 20% of four-year students did. Rates of public benefits utilization at SUNY colleges and universities are generally similar to the averages we observe for colleges and universities nationwide. It is also worth noting that across two- and four-year institutions, students who are secure in their basic needs are still accessing public benefits, albeit at lower rates (30% and 24%, respectively) than students who are insecure.



**FIGURE 9. Use of Public Assistance According to Basic Needs Security Among SUNY Survey Respondents**



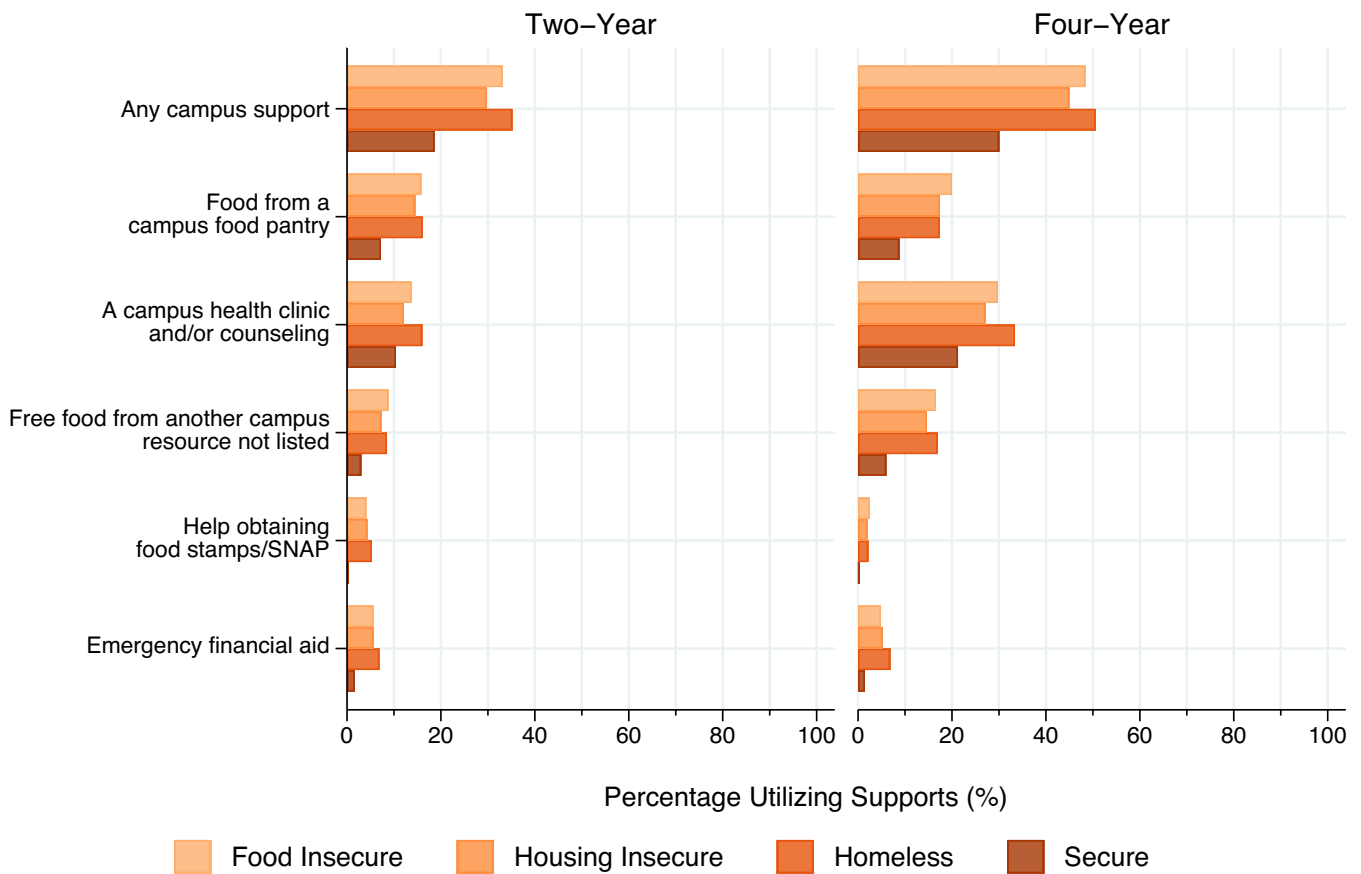
Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Not all types of public assistance are included in the figure above. See [web appendices](#) for more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed and rates of utilization for other types of public assistance.



As noted in the start of this report, a growing number of on-campus supports are being offered to address food insecurity, but not all students who could benefit from resources are accessing them (Figure 10). Of the students surveyed at participating SUNY institutions, food from a campus food pantry, campus health clinic and/or counseling, and free food from another campus resource are the most commonly used on-campus supports. For example, just 17% of all food insecure students used a campus food pantry.

**FIGURE 10. Use of On-Campus Supports According to Basic Needs Security Among SUNY Survey Respondents**



Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Survey questions about campus supports were administered to a subset of randomly selected respondents. Not all types of on-campus supports are included in the figure above. See [web appendices](#) for more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed and rates of utilization for other types of on-campus supports.

## SECTION 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

Clearly, basic needs insecurity is a substantial problem affecting many students. Providing support will help students and institutions thrive. Here are five ways for SUNY to continue advancing its work in this area.

1. Assess the full landscape of existing supports on campus, moving beyond the food pantry, and addressing housing. This should include emergency aid programs, access to public benefits, and case managers. The Hope Center recommends paying close attention to the approaches to outreach, the requirements for eligibility, the data collected on numbers served, and the capacity (dollars, staffing, hours, etc.) of these efforts.
2. Encourage faculty to add a [basic needs security statement](#) to their syllabus in order to inform themselves and their students of supports.
3. Continue to expand public benefits access for students, reducing administrative burden on students wherever possible.
4. Create a centralized basic needs website listing available supports, including:
  - How to access public benefits
  - How to reduce the cost of utilities
  - How to secure emergency aid
  - Where to find free food
  - Who to call if more comprehensive support is needed
5. Consider centralizing fundraising for and distribution of emergency aid across institutions, increasing efficiency and effectiveness and relieving campuses of unnecessary burdens. Many institutional emergency aid programs are relatively small and inadequately implemented. Common problems include:
  - A lack of a student-friendly application process that minimizes hassles for both students and their colleges
  - Limited staff capacity and resources to do effective outreach, and challenges moving from selection of emergency aid to distribution of emergency aid quickly
  - Difficulty selecting recipients in an equitable and efficient manner while recognizing the implicit bias compromising interactions with students
  - Difficulty navigating the conditions Title IV places on emergency aid
  - Struggles maintaining strong positive relationships with students while necessarily having to say no to many requests

The Hope Center also offers the following additional supports for your efforts:

- An annual [national conference](#) focused on inspiration, education, and action
- An [assessment](#) of your campus supports for basic needs security
- [Guides and tools](#) including how to assess basic needs on campus, a Beyond the Food Pantry series, and a digest of existing research on basic needs insecurity from around the country
- [Evaluations](#) of food and housing support programs

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Hope Center thanks the [Jewish Foundation for the Education of Women](#) and [The State University of New York](#), its Office of General Counsel staff who work on violence prevention and response, and the [SUNY Impact Foundation](#) for making this report possible.





## Notes and References

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

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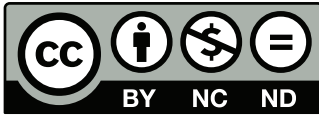
<sup>5</sup> The fall 2019 #RealCollege survey included 33 of 64 SUNY colleges and universities, whereas the spring 2019 SUNY survey included 63 of 64 SUNY colleges and universities. See Food Insecurity Task Force. (2019). [\*Final report to the board of trustees\*](#). State University of New York.

<sup>6</sup> [\*The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987\*](#). Pub. L. No. 100–77, 101 Stat. 482 (1987).

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<sup>9</sup> 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.



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