

CONTEXT: STUDENT BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY IN THE U.S. & HAWAI'I

Table 1. Key Terms & Definitions:

BASIC NEEDS	Students' basic needs include access to nutritious and sufficient food; safe, secure, and adequate housing—to sleep, study, cook, and shower; healthcare to promote sustained mental and physical well-being; affordable technology and transportation; resources for personal hygiene care; and childcare and related needs (The Hope Center).
BASIC NEEDS SECURITY	There is an ecosystem in place to ensure that students' basic needs are met. When students are insecure, there is no ecosystem to support basic needs. Basic needs insecurity is not an individual characteristic and instead a structural one (The Hope Center).
BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY	Students experiencing any basic needs insecurity includes those who experienced food insecurity, housing insecurity or homelessness (The Hope Center)
FOOD SECURITY	When all students, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life (IFPRI 2019; FAO 2020).
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 Hope Center).
HOUSING INSECURITY	Housing insecurity encompasses a broad set of challenges that prevent someone from having a safe, affordable and consistent place to live including the inability to pay rent or move frequently (The Hope Center).
HOMELESSNESS	Homelessness means that a person does not have a fixed, regular and adequate place to live. Students are considered homeless if they are identified as experiencing homelessness or signs of homelessness (for instance, living in a shelter, temporarily with a relative, or in a space not meant for human habitation) (The Hope Center).

Recent Trends in Student Basic Needs Insecurity: National Data

Student basic needs security is critical for ensuring strong academic performance, persistence and graduation and overall student well-being. [In a previous national study](#) conducted between 2015 and 2019 by [The Hope Center for College, Community and Justice](#) (The Hope Center), findings indicate that students across the U.S. experienced high levels of basic needs insecurity in 2019, with 39% being food insecure in the prior 30 days, 46% experiencing housing insecurity in the previous year, while 17% experienced homelessness in the previous year. U.S. college students have been hit particularly hard by the COVID-19 pandemic as [recent research indicates](#) (PDF) that nearly 3 in 5 students experienced some form of basic needs insecurity during the fall 2020 semester.

A limited number of students applied for campus support in 2020 to provide aid for basic needs insecurity. In relation to food security, 53% of students at two-year colleges and 58% at four-year colleges heard of, but did not use help to obtain SNAP benefits. In addition, 52% of students at two-year colleges and 49% of students at four-year colleges had heard of, but had not used emergency housing support. Nation-

al trends also show that students of color experience higher rates of basic needs insecurity. Of the 68% of Black males that experience basic needs insecurity at two-year colleges, only 31% actually utilized campus supports indicating a 37% point gap. Similarly, of 60% of Latinx female students at four-year colleges, only 26% used available campus supports, creating a 34% point gap. Both of these statistics show a larger gap in percentage points for students of color who do not access supports than the percentage gap for White male students at four-year colleges (17%).

UH System Student Basic Need Insecurity: 2021

UH contracted with [The Hope Center](#) to administer the #RealCollege Survey to students across all 10 campuses in the UH System. The study found that a total of 58% of UH respondents experienced some form of basic needs insecurity, with 39% experiencing food insecurity in the previous 30 days, 44% experiencing housing insecurity in the past 12 months, and 14% experienced homelessness in the previous 12 months. Despite the low response rate (2%), these UH findings are consistent with the [prior national studies](#) of student basic needs insecurity conducted over the last five years.

In addition to key data mentioned above, 38% of students who took the #RealCollege Survey showed at least moderate anxiety, while 58% of students who experienced basic needs insecurity didn't apply for campus support because they didn't know how. Similarly, 15% of students who had some form of basic needs insecurity utilized emergency aid, while 45% didn't hear of any emergency aid programs on campuses. As troubling as these findings are, it is clear that students are not informed enough about on-campus support to address basic needs insecurity. These statistics support the formation of our SBNMP to specifically address informing student populations about campus resources.

Key Risk Factors and Root Causes of Student Basic Needs Insecurity

A growing number of studies examining the relationship between socio-economic characteristics and basic needs insecurity have been conducted over the last 20 years ([Wilcox et al. 2021](#)). Findings indicate that low socio-economic status (SES)² is a reliable predictor of individual and household food insecurity for the general population and for U.S. college students ([Tarasuk et al. 2001](#); [Olson et al. 2011](#); [Gaines et al. 2014](#); [Darmon & Drewnowski 2015](#); [Dharmasena et al. 2016](#); [El Zein et al. 2017](#); [Goldrick-Rab et al. 2019](#); [USDA ERS 2020](#)). Numerous studies have also shown that basic needs insecurity is common for college students with low SES ([Broton and Goldrick-Rab 2016](#); [Morris et al. 2016](#); [Martinez et al. 2018](#)). High-risk groups for food, housing and financial insecurity have been identified as: students at two-year institutions; African-American students; students who are financially independent of parents or guardians; LGBTQ+

2 SES refers to a diverse set of economic and social attributes, such as level of educational attainment, ethnicity, immigration status, prior incarceration, occupation and financial assets, and serves to define an individual's economic and social position in relation to others in society. See: Andrew, M. K. (2010). Social vulnerability in old age. In *Brocklehurst's Textbook of Geriatric Medicine and Gerontology* (pp. 198-204).

students; students who had experienced childhood food insecurity; being both a low-income and first-generation college student; students with prior military service; single mother students; students who are former foster youth; federal Pell Grant recipients; and students with prior criminal convictions ([Engle and Tinto 2008](#); [Dubick et al. 2016](#); [Bruening et al. 2017](#); [El Zein et al 2017](#); [Bruening et al. 2018](#); [AACU 2019](#); [Goldrick-Rab et al. 2018](#); [Goldrick-Rab et al. 2019](#)). Such risk factors should serve to inform targeted basic needs outreach programming.

Importantly, recent studies have also indicated that students of both moderate- and middle-income status are increasingly found to be insecure in basic needs ([Morris et al. 2016](#); [Brotton and Goldrick-Rab 2017](#); [Goldrick-Rab et al. 2017](#); [Goldrick-Rab et al. 2018](#)). In multiple large-scale studies, low- and even moderate-income status has been identified as a key predictor of student food and basic needs insecurity across individual U.S. colleges, multi-campus university systems, and national studies involving a diverse range of post-secondary institutions ([Brotton et al. 2018](#); [Goldrick-Rab et al. 2018](#), [Martinez et al. 2018](#); [Wooten et al. 2019](#)). This pattern has been partially explained through the identification of the growing levels of economic inequality ([Saez 2017](#); [Saez 2020](#)) and declining income mobility in the U.S. ([Chetty et al. 2017](#)), which has influenced the overall affordability of attending college ([Kelchen et al. 2017](#); [Payne-Sturges et al. 2018](#)).

Multiple studies have indicated that declining affordability of higher education can be traced to the broader socio-economic factors of the stagnation of U.S. family incomes, and need-based financial assistance programs not keeping pace with the increasing cost of attending college in the U.S. ([Kelchen et al. 2017](#); [Brotton and Goldrick-Rab 2017](#); [US GAO 2018](#)). These factors are compounded by the fact that, until recently, U.S. college students have been eligible for federal SNAP benefits only in certain cases ([US GAO 2018](#)). Such circumstances can leave many U.S. college students with limited purchasing power to fulfill basic food, housing and other financial needs ([Bruening et al. 2017](#)).

Critically important are the findings indicating that basic needs insecurity and inadequate food consumption contributes to an increased risk of malnutrition and chronic illness, poor mental health, alcohol use, compromised academic performance and reduced likelihood of college graduation ([Darmon & Drewnowski 2015](#); [Brotton and Goldrick-Rab 2017](#); [Bruening et al. 2018](#); [Phillips et al. 2018](#); [US GAO 2018](#); [Haskett et al. 2020](#); [Leung et al. 2021](#)). Many of these conditions and negative performance outcomes were significantly exacerbated by the economic and public health impacts of the COVID-19 global pandemic ([Goldrick-Rab et al. 2020](#); [Davitt et al. 2021](#); [Duran & Núñez 2021](#); [Goldrick-Rab 2021](#)).