



For College, Community, and Justice

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# Minnesota State Colleges and Universities #RealCollege Survey Report

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March 2020

## Executive Summary

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 2018 and 2019 at 28 of the 37 public two-year and four-year colleges and universities in Minnesota, a subset of the 227 institutions surveyed across the United States.

In 2018 and 2019, approximately 9,812 students from 25 two-year and three four-year colleges in Minnesota responded to the #RealCollege survey. The results indicate:

- 37% of respondents were food insecure in the prior 30 days
- 48% of respondents were housing insecure in the previous year
- 18% of respondents were homeless in the previous year

Compared to students attending two-year colleges elsewhere in the country, students surveyed in Minnesota's two-year colleges experience somewhat lower rates of food insecurity and housing insecurity, and a higher rate of homelessness. However, the rates of these challenges are still substantial. In addition, among the four-year college students surveyed in Minnesota, rates of housing insecurity are higher, while rates of food insecurity and homelessness are lower when compared to rates nationally.<sup>1</sup>

There is wide variation in rates of basic needs insecurity across institutions in Minnesota. As is true nationwide, basic needs insecurity continues to be more common for students attending two-year colleges than those attending four-year colleges. For example, housing insecurity rates for two-year colleges generally range between 38% and 58%. Students often marginalized in higher education are at greater risk of basic needs insecurity while attending Minnesota State colleges and universities. These groups include students identifying as Indigenous, American Indian or Alaskan Native, and Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian; those identifying as nonbinary or transgender; and those who are former foster youth or returning citizens.

Minnesota State colleges and universities are taking steps to advance access to public benefits for their students. 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 create 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.



Minnesota has been making strides in addressing students' basic needs. In 2019 Governor Tim Walz signed a Hunger-Free Campus Act, which encourages campuses to establish food delivery systems (like food pantries), have a campus hunger task force, hold a hunger awareness event, provide information to students on programs that reduce food insecurity, and establish an emergency assistance grant for students. He also declared a College Food Insecurity Awareness Day in October 2019. In addition, the Minnesota Legislature established the Emergency Assistance for Postsecondary Students Grant Program in May 2017. This program provides funding and resources to Minnesota State colleges and universities with a demonstrable homeless population. Grant funds are intended to meet immediate student needs related to housing, food, and transportation that would otherwise prevent students from completing their term. Student advocacy, including via LeadMN, has been essential to securing this support.

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 2018 and 2019 #RealCollege surveys on basic needs of students in Minnesota State 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 survey participants and methodologies used for this report, refer to the 2019 [web appendices](#) and the [2018 report](#).

### THE DATA

The data elements 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 93,900 enrolled students, yielding an estimated response rate of 10.5%, or approximately 9,810 total student participants. In this report, we drew on data from the 2018 and 2019 #RealCollege surveys for our key measures: rates of food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness. More detailed breakdowns were based solely on data from the 2019 #RealCollege survey. 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 Minnesota State colleges and universities participated in the fall 2018 & 2019 survey:

#### Two-year colleges

- Alexandria Technical & Community College (2019)
- Anoka Technical College (2019)
- Anoka-Ramsey Community College (2019)
- Central Lakes College Brainerd (2019)
- Central Lakes College Staples (2019)
- Dakota County Technical College (2019)
- Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College (2019)
- Hennepin Technical College (2018)
- Hibbing Community College (2019)
- Inver Hills Community College (2018)
- Itasca Community College (2019)
- Mesabi Range College (2019)
- Minneapolis Community and Technical College (2019)
- Minnesota State College Southeast (2019)
- Minnesota State Community and Technical College (2018 & 2019)
- Normandale Community College (2018)
- North Hennepin Community College (2018)
- Northland Community and Technical College (2019)
- Northwest Technical College (2019)
- Rainy River Community College (2019)
- Ridgewater College (2019)
- Riverland Community College (2019)
- Rochester Community & Technical College (2019)
- Saint Paul College (2019)
- St. Cloud Technical and Community College (2018 & 2019)

#### Four-year colleges

- Metropolitan State University (2018 & 2019)
- Minnesota State University Moorhead (2019)
- Southwest Minnesota State University (2019)

## SECTION 1:

### Prevalence of Basic Needs Insecurity

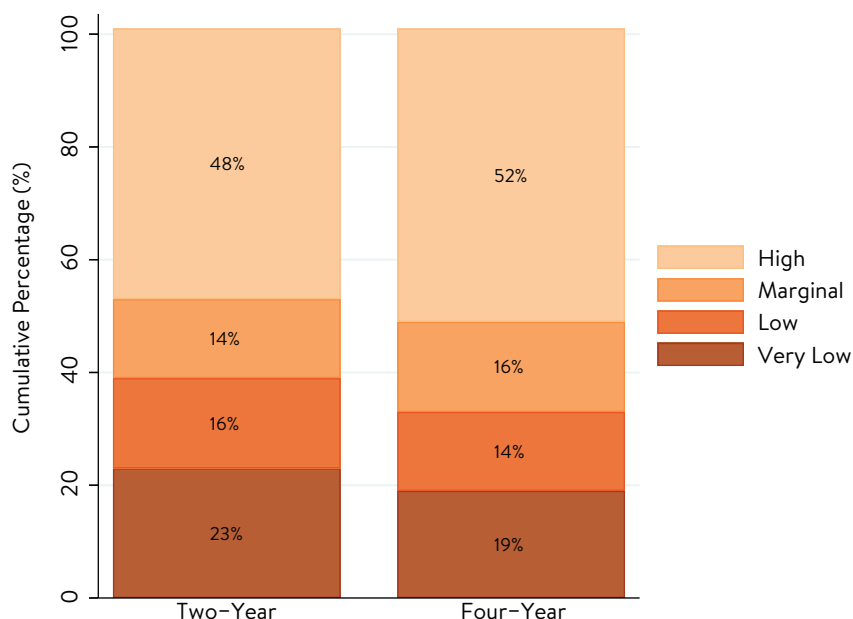
What fraction of students are affected by basic needs insecurity? This section examines the prevalence of food insecurity during the month prior to the survey, and the prevalence of housing insecurity and homelessness during the previous year.

#### 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 Minnesota State colleges and universities? During the 30 days preceding the survey, approximately 39% of survey respondents attending two-year institutions experienced food insecurity, with 23% assessed at the low level and 16% at the very low level of food security (Figure 1). Approximately 33% of survey respondents attending four-year institutions experienced food insecurity, with 14% assessed at the low level and 19% at the very low level of food security. About one in three respondents attending two-year institutions ran short on food, and 26% said that they went hungry, compared to 25% and 20% of respondents at four-year institutions, respectively (Figure 2).

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



Source: 2018 & 2019 #RealCollege surveys

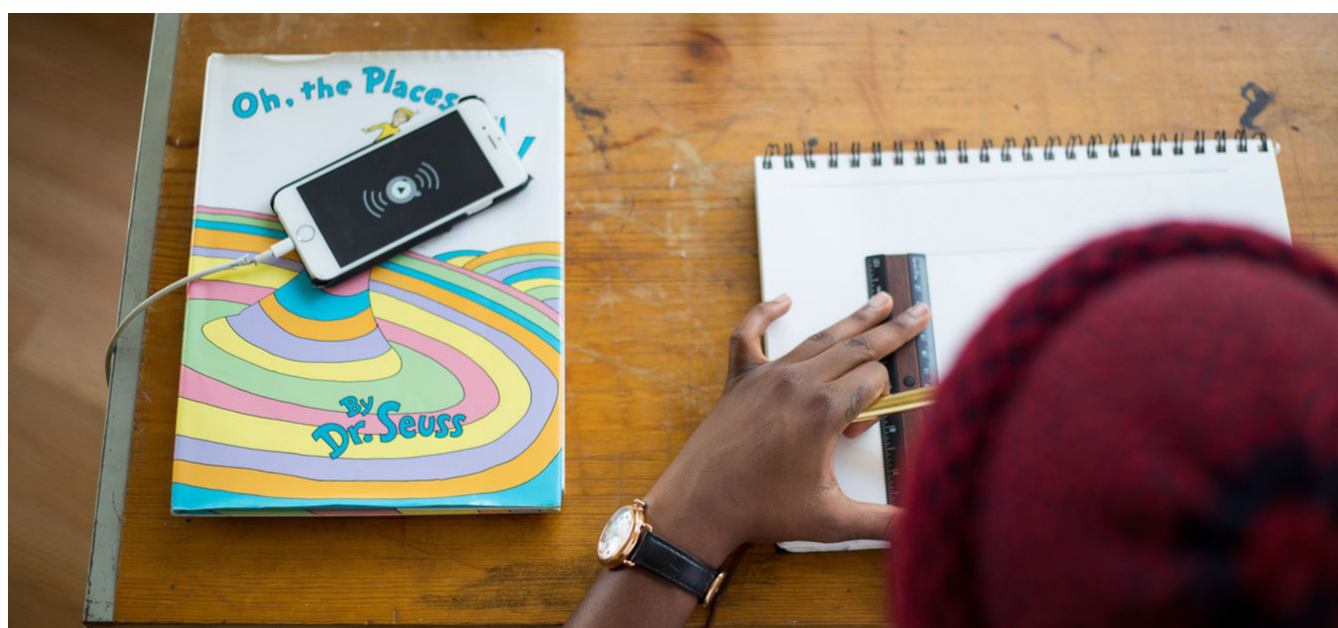
Notes: According to the USDA, students at either low or very low food security are termed “food insecure.” For more details on the food security module used in this report, refer to the [web appendices](#). Cumulative percentages may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

**FIGURE 2. Food Security Among Minnesota Survey Respondents**

| Two-Year |   | Four-Year |
|----------|---|-----------|
| 42%      | I couldn't afford to eat balanced meals.  | 39%       |
| 40%      | I worried whether my food would run out before I got money to buy more.                                 | 34%       |
| 32%      | The food that I bought did not last and I did not have the money to buy more.                           | 26%       |
| 33%      | I cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there was not enough money for food.                   | 25%       |
| 31%      | I ate less than I felt I should because there was not enough money for food.                            | 24%       |
| 26%      | I was hungry but did not eat because there was not enough money for food.                               | 20%       |
| 24%      | I cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there was not enough money for food (3 or more times). | 18%       |
| 15%      | I lost weight because there was not enough money for food.  | 10%       |
| 9%       | I did not eat for a whole day because there was not enough money for food.                              | 6%        |
| 6%       | 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 Minnesota State colleges and universities, 49% at two-year institutions and 43% at four-year institutions experienced housing insecurity in the past 12 months (Figure 3). The most commonly reported challenge is experiencing a rent or mortgage increase that made it difficult to pay (19% of students at two-year institutions and 18% 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 Minnesota Survey Respondents**

| Two-Year   |   | Four-Year  |
|------------|---|------------|
| <b>49%</b> | Any item  | <b>43%</b> |
| <b>19%</b> | Had a rent or mortgage increase that made it difficult to pay | <b>18%</b> |
| <b>19%</b> | Did not pay full amount of rent or mortgage                   | <b>15%</b> |
| <b>20%</b> | Did not pay full amount of utilities                          | <b>13%</b> |
| <b>16%</b> | Had an account default or go into collections                 | <b>11%</b> |
| <b>16%</b> | Moved in with people due to financial problems                | <b>13%</b> |
| <b>8%</b>  | Lived with others beyond the expected capacity of the housing | <b>8%</b>  |
| <b>7%</b>  | Left household because felt unsafe                            | <b>5%</b>  |
| <b>4%</b>  | Moved three or more times                                     | <b>4%</b>  |
| <b>1%</b>  | Received a summons to appear in housing court                 | <b>1%</b>  |

Source: 2018 & 2019 #RealCollege surveys

Notes: In the above graph, the top percentage, “Any item,” represents the rate of housing insecurity for all Minnesota survey respondents in 2018 and 2019. All other percentages represent 2019 rates. For more details on the housing insecurity module used in this report, refer to the [web appendices](#).

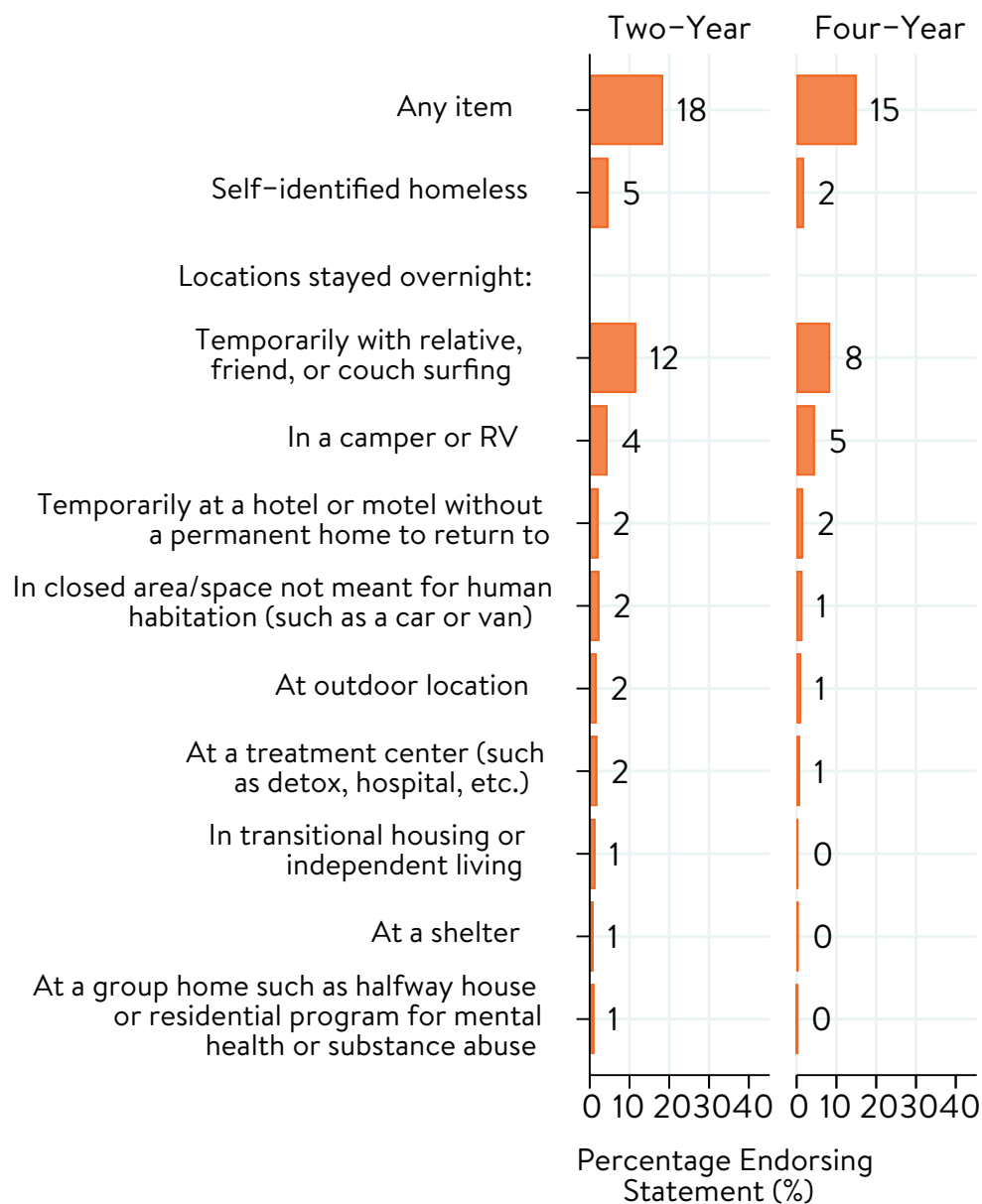


**Homelessness** means that a person does not have a fixed, regular, and adequate place to live. Students were identified as homeless if they responded affirmatively to a question asking if they had been homeless or they identified living conditions that are considered signs of homelessness. California 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 Homelessness Assistance Act.<sup>5</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>6</sup>

How prevalent is homelessness? Homelessness affected 18% of survey respondents at two-year institutions and 15% at four-year institutions in Minnesota (Figure 4). Five 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 stayed with a relative or friend, or couch surfed.



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



Source: 2018 & 2019 #RealCollege surveys

Notes: In the above graph, the top percentage, “Any item,” represents the rate of homelessness for all Minnesota survey respondents in 2018 and 2019. All other percentages represent 2019 rates. 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 Minnesota students responding to the survey, 60% at two-year institutions experienced food insecurity, housing insecurity, or homelessness during the previous year, whereas 54% of four-year students did (Figure 5). Thirty percent of respondents from two-year institutions and 23% 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 Minnesota Survey Respondents**



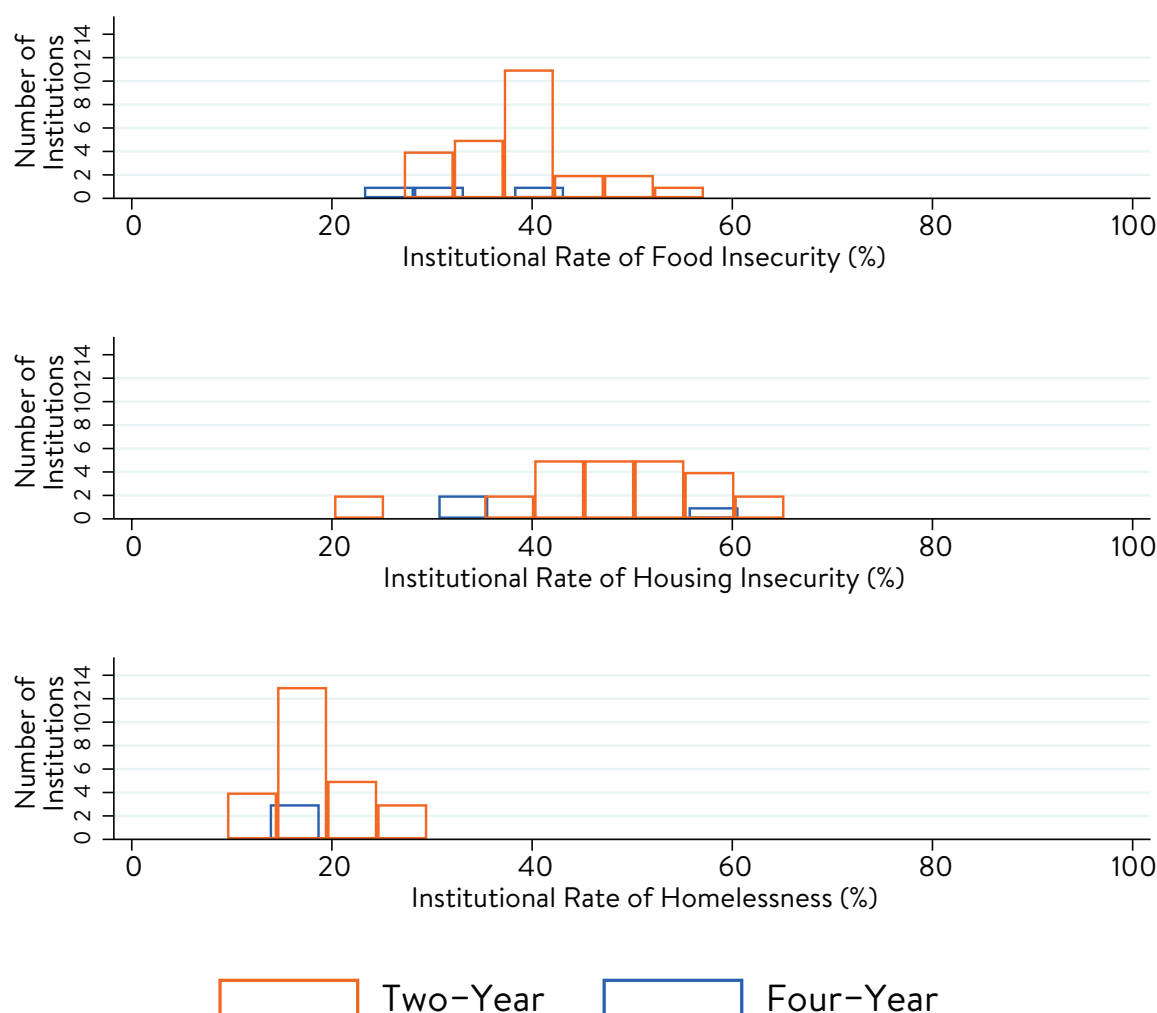
Source: 2018 & 2019 #RealCollege surveys

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 Minnesota State colleges and universities. This variation could be attributed to a number of factors, including regional differences across the state. Institution-level rates of food insecurity range between 27% and 53% at two-year institutions and between 23% and 42% at four-year institutions. Rates of housing insecurity vary widely across institutions as well: 20% to 65% of students attending two-year institutions experienced housing insecurity, as did 31% to 58% of students attending four-year institutions. Institution-level rates of student homelessness range from 10% to 28% at two-year institutions and from 14% to 16% at four-year institutions.

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



Source: 2018 & 2019 #RealCollege surveys

Notes: For more details on institutional rates shown in the figure above, refer to the [web appendices](#).



## SECTION 2:

### Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurity

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>7</sup> This section highlights disparities in basic needs insecurity by student demographic, academic, or 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/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 Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian (50%), Black (53%), and Indigenous (67%) students (Table 1). Rates of housing insecurity are consistently higher than those of food insecurity and the patterns across groups are similar (Table 1). Students who identify as Indigenous or as American Indian or Alaska Native have the highest rates of homelessness, followed closely by Hispanic or Latinx and Black students; as with the other basic needs insecurities, White students have lower rates of homelessness than most of their peers.



**TABLE 1: Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurities by Race and Ethnicity Among Minnesota Survey Respondents**

|  | Number of Students | Food Insecurity (%) | Housing Insecurity (%) | Homelessness (%) |
|--|--------------------|---------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Racial or Ethnic Background</b>                       |                    |                     |                        |                  |
| American Indian or Alaska Native                         | 242                | 54                  | 64                     | 27               |
| Black  | 561                | 53                  | 60                     | 22               |
| Hispanic or Latinx                                       | 312                | 49                  | 60                     | 25               |
| Indigenous   | 105                | 67                  | 74                     | 43               |
| Middle Eastern or North African or Arab or Arab American | 58                 | 48                  | 57                     | 16               |
| Other Asian or Asian American                            | 239                | 46                  | 49                     | 13               |
| Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian                      | 34                 | 50                  | 65                     | 21               |
| Southeast Asian  | 170                | 46                  | 54                     | 11               |
| White  | 4,165              | 32                  | 43                     | 17               |
| Other  | 109                | 43                  | 59                     | 20               |
| Prefer not to answer                                     | 67                 | 45                  | 55                     | 34               |

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/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 full-time is 43%, while the housing insecurity rate for students attending part-time is 51%. Students that 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: Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurities by Enrollment Status Among Minnesota Survey Respondents**

|                                   | Number of Students | Food Insecurity (%) | Housing Insecurity (%) | Homelessness (%) |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| <b>College Enrollment Status</b>  |                    |                     |                        |                  |
| Full-time (at least 12 credits)   | 3,920              | 36                  | 43                     | 17               |
| Part-time (fewer than 12 credits) | 1,777              | 36                  | 51                     | 18               |
| <b>Level of Study</b>             |                    |                     |                        |                  |
| Undergraduate                     | 4,383              | 37                  | 46                     | 17               |
| Graduate                          | 779                | 35                  | 45                     | 19               |
| Non-degree                        | 528                | 33                  | 41                     | 19               |
| <b>Years in College</b>           |                    |                     |                        |                  |
| Less than 1                       | 1,879              | 34                  | 38                     | 19               |
| 1 to 2                            | 1,950              | 37                  | 45                     | 18               |
| Three or more                     | 1,869              | 38                  | 53                     | 16               |
| Prefer not to answer              | 67                 | 45                  | 55                     | 34               |

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; non-binary and transgender 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 Minnesota Survey Respondents**

|                           | Number of Students | Food Insecurity (%) | Housing Insecurity (%) | Homelessness (%) |
|---------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Gender Identity</b>    |                    |                     |                        |                  |
| Female                    | 3,814              | 37                  | 48                     | 17               |
| Male                      | 1,344              | 32                  | 38                     | 19               |
| Non-binary/Third gender   | 86                 | 51                  | 65                     | 35               |
| Transgender               | 72                 | 51                  | 64                     | 28               |
| Self-Describe             | 35                 | 40                  | 57                     | 31               |
| <b>Sexual Orientation</b> |                    |                     |                        |                  |
| Heterosexual              | 4,277              | 34                  | 44                     | 16               |
| Gay or Lesbian            | 152                | 47                  | 57                     | 24               |
| Bisexual                  | 488                | 43                  | 57                     | 24               |
| Self-describe             | 154                | 51                  | 61                     | 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 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, and returning citizens are more likely to experience basic needs insecurity than their peers (Table 4). For example, 48% of parenting students experience food insecurity and 63% experience housing insecurity—rates of insecurity higher than their peers without children (33% and 41%, respectively). Nearly one third of returning citizens and former foster youth experience homelessness, almost double the average rate (18%).

**TABLE 4: Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurities by Student Experience Among Minnesota Survey Respondents**

|  | Number of Students | Food Insecurity (%) | Housing Insecurity (%) | Homelessness (%) |
|--|--------------------|---------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Parenting Student</b>               |                    |                     |                        |                  |
| Yes                                    | 1,145              | 48                  | 63                     | 15               |
| No                                     | 4,442              | 33                  | 41                     | 18               |
| <b>Student has Been in Foster Care</b> |                    |                     |                        |                  |
| Yes                                    | 257                | 57                  | 73                     | 33               |
| No                                     | 4,928              | 35                  | 44                     | 17               |
| <b>Student Served in the Military</b>  |                    |                     |                        |                  |
| Yes                                    | 60                 | 38                  | 52                     | 17               |
| No                                     | 5,055              | 36                  | 45                     | 18               |
| <b>Student is a Returning Citizen</b>  |                    |                     |                        |                  |
| Yes                                    | 287                | 53                  | 72                     | 33               |
| No                                     | 5,095              | 35                  | 44                     | 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. 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](#).

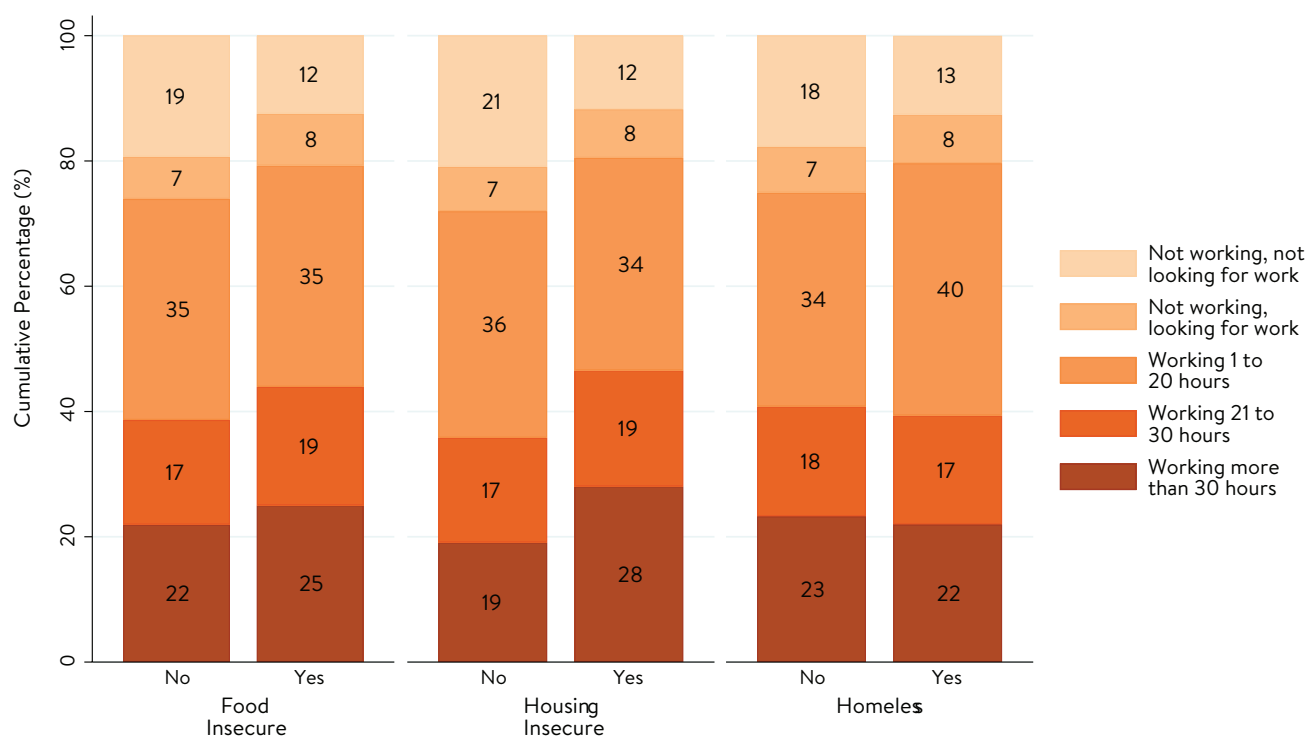


## SECTION 3:

### Employment and Academic Performance

Students who experience basic needs insecurity are overwhelmingly active participants in the labor force. The majority (80%) of students who experience food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness are employed (Figure 7). Among working students, those who experience basic food or housing insecurity often work more hours than other students.

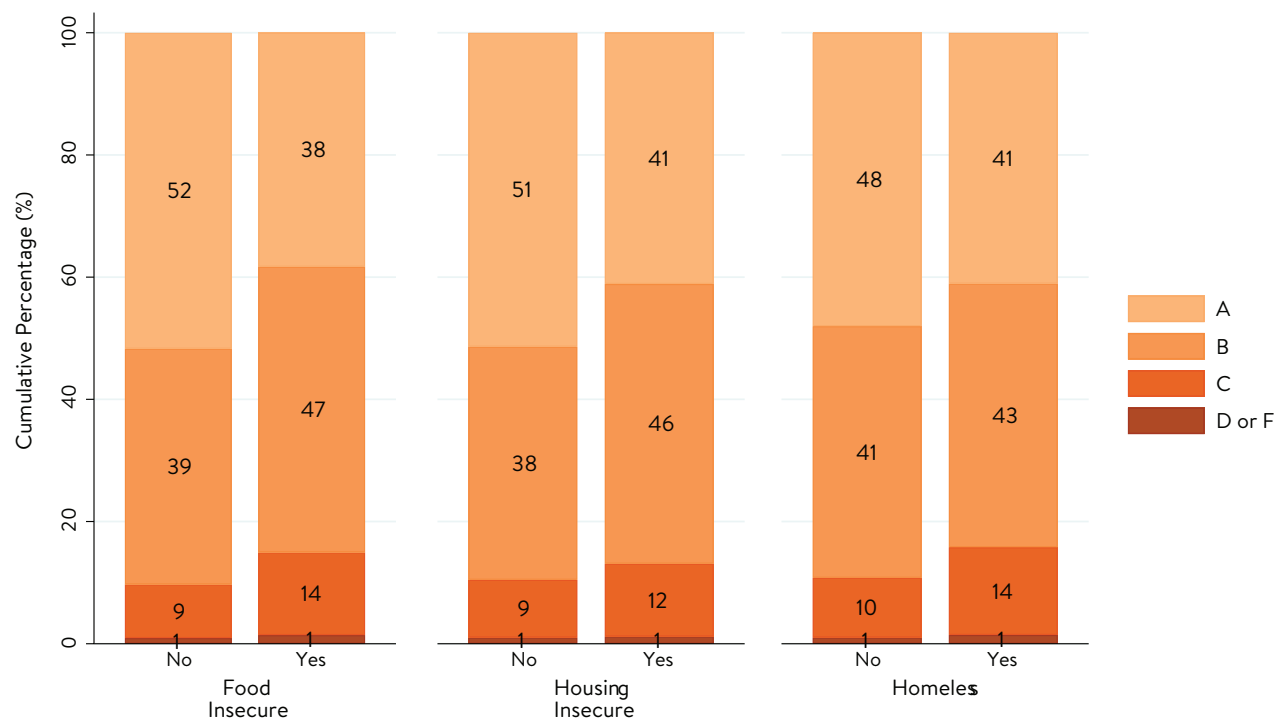
**FIGURE 7. Employment Behavior by Basic Need Insecurity Status Among Minnesota Survey Respondents**



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](#).

**FIGURE 8. Self-Reported Grades by Basic Need Insecurity Status Among Minnesota 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](#).

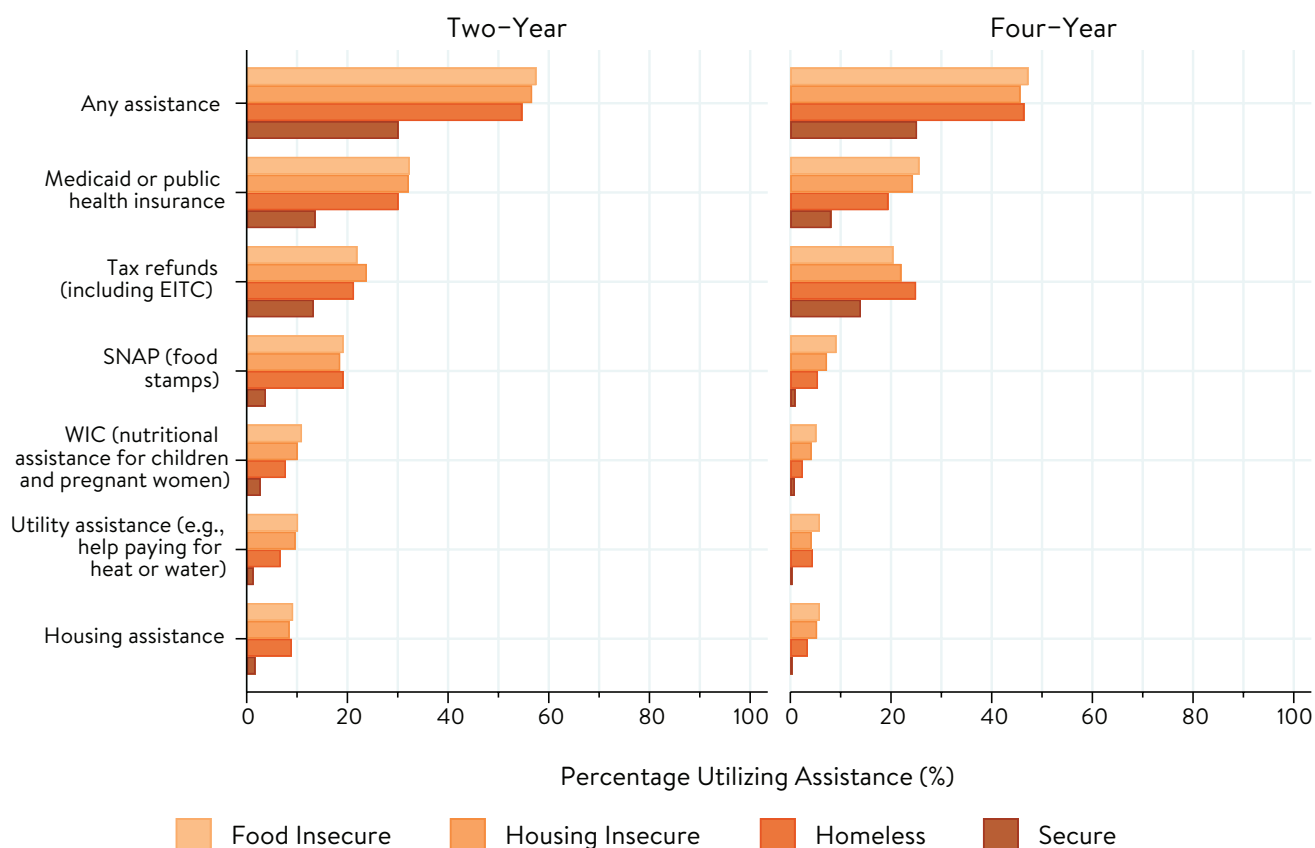


## SECTION 4:

### 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>8</sup> Medicaid or public health insurance, SNAP, and tax refunds are the benefits used most often by students surveyed in Minnesota, though they remain quite low given the needs of students responding. For example, 19% of food insecure students across two-year institutions receive SNAP benefits, while only 9% of four-year students do. Likewise, only 9% of students attending two-year institutions and 5% of four-year students who experience housing insecurity receive housing assistance. Thirty percent of students attending two-year institutions who experience homelessness utilized Medicaid or public health insurance, while only 20% of four-year students did. It is 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 25%, respectively) than students who are insecure.

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



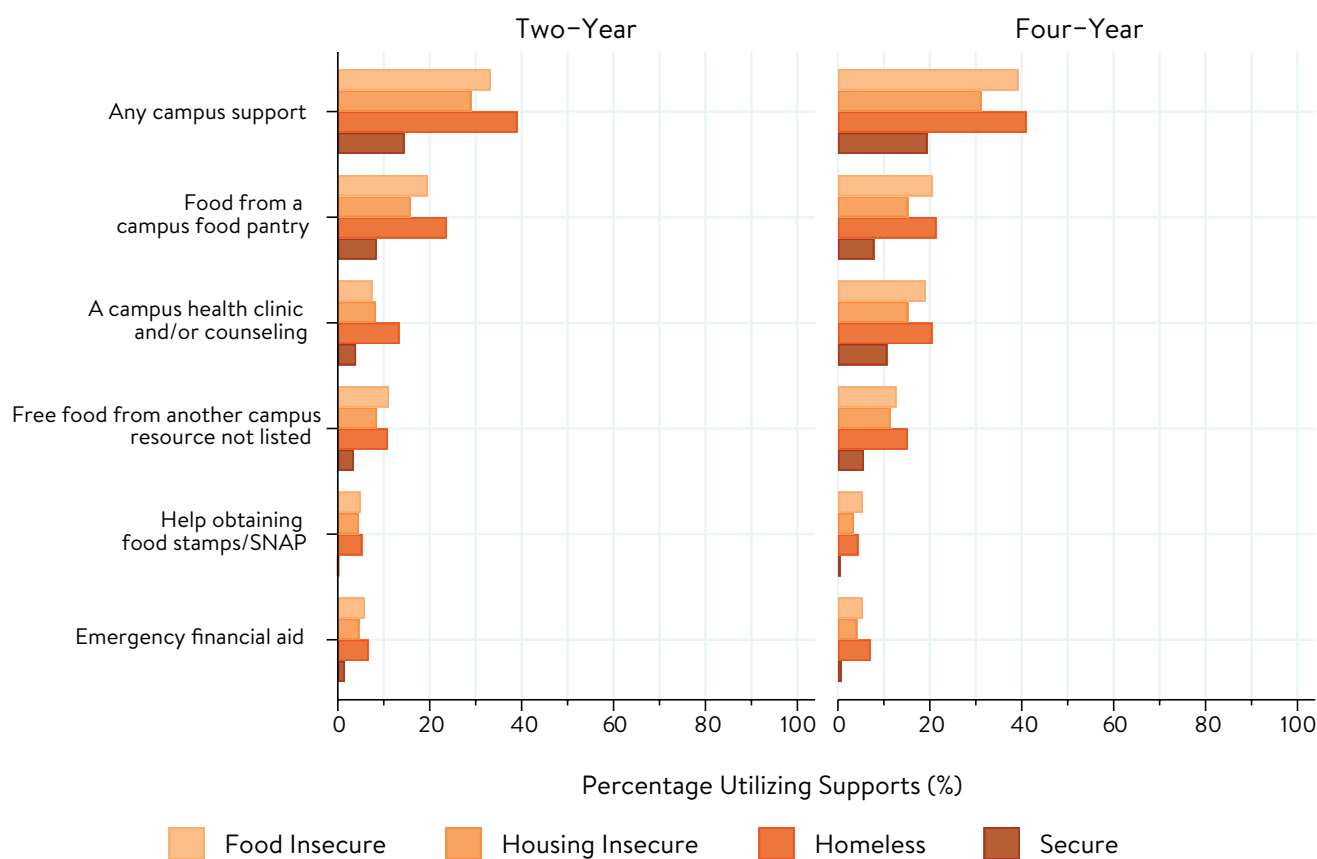
Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

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.



A growing number of on-campus supports are being offered, but again, few students are accessing them (Figure 10). Of the students surveyed at participating Minnesota 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, about 20% of food insecure students used a campus food pantry.

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



Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Not all types on-campus supports are included in the figure above. Survey questions about campus supports were administered to a subset of randomly selected respondents. 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 Minnesota to continue advancing its work in this area.

1. Assess the landscape of existing supports on campus, including food pantries, 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. Please see the Hope Center's survey of campus food pantries for an example.<sup>9</sup>
2. Encourage faculty to add a [basic needs security statement](#) to their syllabus in order to inform themselves and their students of supports. Minnesota State colleges and universities also provides examples.
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

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## 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>7</sup> Wood, J. L., & Harris, F. (2018). [\*Experiences with “acute” food insecurity among college students\*](#). Educational Researcher, 47(2), 142–145; Goldrick-Rab, S., Baker-Smith, C., Coca, V., Looker, E., & Williams, T. (2019). [\*College and university basic needs insecurity: A national #RealCollege survey report\*](#). The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice; Crutchfield, R. & Maguire, J. (2018). [\*Study of student basic needs\*](#). Humboldt State University, Arcata, California.
- <sup>8</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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