

# #REALCOLLEGE 2021: BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY DURING THE ONGOING PANDEMIC

MARCH 2021

Entering the fall 2020 term, higher education was reeling from the coronavirus pandemic. Enrollment was down — particularly among students most at risk of basic needs insecurity; fewer students had completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid; and college retention rates had dropped. Students and faculty were stressed and anxious. And by the end of the term, more than 267,000 Americans died. At the same time, the federal government pumped an unprecedented \$6+ billion of emergency aid via the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

This report examines the pandemic's impact on the #RealCollege students who were able to continue their education in this challenging environment. We assessed students' basic needs security and their well-being as indicated by their employment status, academic engagement, and mental health.

## OUR ELECTRONIC SURVEY WAS COMPLETED BY

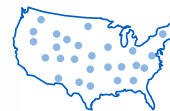


NEARLY

**200,000** (11% response rate)  
STUDENTS ATTENDING



**202** COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES IN



**42** STATES

**130** two-year colleges

**72** four-year colleges and universities

## THESE STUDENTS TOLD US THAT...

NEARLY  
**3 IN 5**  
experienced  
basic needs insecurity

FOOD INSECURITY  
AFFECTED

**39%** at two-year institutions

**29%** at four-year institutions

HOUSING INSECURITY  
AFFECTED

**48%**

HOMELESSNESS  
AFFECTED

**14%**

THE  
**BLACK/WHITE GAP**  
IN BASIC NEEDS  
INSECURITY WAS

**16** percentage points

## WE ALSO LEARNED...

**41%**  
had a close friend or family member who was sick with COVID-19, while

**7%**  
were sick with COVID-19 themselves

**13%**

LOST A LOVED ONE TO COVID-19

with Latinx students more than twice as likely as White students to lose a loved one



**35%** of students exhibited at least moderate anxiety

Among students

FACING BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY, access to supports was limited

APPLIED FOR EMERGENCY AID **34%**

RECEIVED EMERGENCY AID **32%**

RECEIVED SNAP **18%**

**52%**

DID NOT APPLY FOR SUPPORTS because they did not know how



While vaccines offer hope for fall 2021, the impact of the pandemic will reverberate for years. Providing students the supports they need — including for their basic needs — is the best way to ensure they can complete degrees.