

NORTH CAROLINA POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION FOOD INSECURITY



INTRODUCTION

The United States Department of Agriculture defines **food insecurity** as a state of limited or uncertain access to adequate food. Students enrolled in higher education face food insecurity due to the increasing costs of college and the limitations of financial aid, rising costs of living, and employment insecurity. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, postsecondary institutions were already recognizing **food insecurity as an obstacle to student retention and completion**. As institutions of higher education (IHEs) across the country closed their campuses, students experienced greater financial challenges, housing insecurity, and food insecurity.

Specifically, campus closures impacted many higher education students who rely on campus dining services, and campus food pantries where available. Students also lost access to case managers who help facilitate access to public benefits and community-based support services. The emergency plans and resources offered by IHEs have failed to meet the pre-existing needs of their students, which have only been exacerbated by the pandemic.

FACTS ABOUT TODAY'S HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

37%
are 25 or older

49%
are financially independent from their parents

64%
work

+

40%
work full time

24%
have children or other dependents

57%
live independently – away from their parents or campus housing





NATIONAL OVERVIEW

As IHEs expanded priorities to include ensuring that students’ non-academic needs are met, many found that limited data and information on the prevalence of food insecurity among college students negatively impacted their ability to quickly respond to these needs. Unlike food insecurity among K-12 students which can be tracked through household and school data, the existing literature on postsecondary food insecurity is limited to select few institutions and a sample size of students.

[The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice](#) at Temple University is one of the few institutions dedicated to conducting research on the challenges affecting college access and completion, including the basic needs of students such as food and housing security. Since 2015, the Hope Center has conducted the [#RealCollege Survey](#), the largest annual assessment of student basic needs, with survey completion by 330,000 students representing more than 400 colleges and universities.

[#RealCollege2020](#) found that 39% of student respondents had been food insecure in the 30 days

prior to completing the survey. Although in need of relief, only 15% of respondents applied for SNAP and emergency aid. There are also evident racial and ethnic disparities regarding basic needs insecurities, where it has been found that a [19-percentage point gap](#) exists between the basic needs insecurity of Black and white students. The preview of the fall 2020 survey findings found that students’ access to basic needs supports have been compromised, mental health challenges are widespread, and that students need additional emergency aid.

In 2019, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) conducted a review of 31 studies on food insecurity among postsecondary students. Campus food pantries and additional resources are not enough to meet students’ basic needs, especially considering the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on student need and institutional capacity. The GAO estimates that [57 percent of students](#) who are experiencing food insecurity and are eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) do not receive benefits.

BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS DURING THE PANDEMIC

	WHITE STUDENTS		BLACK STUDENTS		2019 #RC FINDINGS WHITE STUDENTS	2019 #RC FINDINGS BLACK STUDENTS
	N	%	N	%	%	%
Basic Needs Insecurity						
Any Basic Needs Insecurity	9,663	52	4,846	71	56	72
Food Insecure	6,376	35	3,913	58	36	54
Housing Insecure	6,105	33	2,910	43	43	58
Homelessness	1,977	11	1,043	15	17	20

IMPACT ON STUDENT OUTCOMES

Food insecurity can affect students' academic performance, overall health and wellness, and behavior. These factors all impact student retention and completion rates. A [study](#) found that food insecure students had significantly higher perceived stress, disordered eating behaviors, and poorer sleep quality compared to food secure students.

Students' [self-reported grades](#) in the #RealCollege survey indicate that food insecurity affects students' academic achievement as well: 40 percent of students experiencing food insecurity achieved A's compared to 52 percent of food secure students. In addition to grades, students also reduce their course load to due food insecurity: [one in four students](#) drop a class as a result. These effects can impact students' ability to graduate as well as their employment opportunities in the future. Without adequate interventions and supports, students experiencing food insecurity will be at risk of dropping out.

NORTH CAROLINA

Across the state, efforts to quantify and address issues of food insecurity are localized and limited to individual institutions. In 2018, a [report](#) found that 14 percent of students at North Carolina State University experienced low or very low food security and that the prevalence of food insecurity is similar for both undergraduate and graduate students. A [similar survey](#) of UNC Charlotte students found that 32 percent of student respondents were food insecure. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, North Carolina's college food pantries have seen an [increase in students' visits](#). Many food pantries adjusted their delivery methodology to allow for contact-free delivery and distributed gift cards to students. In February 2021, Duke University's Campus Pantry Collaborative will be hosting the Food Insecurity Symposium to address issues of food insecurity alongside their UNC-Chapel Hill partner organization.

North Carolina's IHEs have, overall, not participated in the [#RealCollegeSurvey](#). Only one two-year IHE participated in 2016 and 2017, with no other IHEs participating since then. In states where legislative and IHE-level policy changes have been made, like New York and California, #RealCollegeSurvey participation is much higher, especially within the community college sector. A #RealCollege [survey](#) conducted in the spring of 2020 to assess basic student needs found that 44 percent of the students at two-year institutions and 38 percent of the students at four-year institutions were affected by food insecurity during the months of April and May of 2020.

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PERCENT OF FOOD INSECURITY INITIATIVES BY IHE SYSTEM IN NC

SYSTEM	TOTAL CAMPUSES	ON-CAMPUS PANTRY	SHORT-TERM ASST/ MEAL SHARE	PRE-PACKAGED MEALS	COVID-19	ACCESSING SNAP	EXTERNAL RESOURCES	NO PUBLIC INFO
UNC	17	82%	35%	18%	17	82%	35%	18%
NCICU	36	28%	3%	6%	36	28%	3%	6%
NCCCS	58	53%	5%	7%	58	53%	5%	7%



39%
of students experienced food insecurity

15%
of students applied for SNAP

15%
of students applied for Emergency Aid

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The data suggests that there is a higher incidence of food insecurity among community college students than among traditional, four-year institutions. However, our [survey of campus resources](#) in North Carolina found that only 53 percent of NCCCS institutions have on-campus food pantries compared to 82 percent of UNC system schools. While community colleges disproportionately serve low-income students and students of color, North Carolina's community colleges receive [\\$11,118 less funding](#) per full-time enrolled student. This results in a significant equity gap as spending is tied to students' ability to persist through college and graduate. Community colleges with low revenue do not have the funding or resources to properly serve and support their student population comprised of students from lower-income backgrounds, first-generation college students, working parents, and underrepresented students in higher education.

BEST PRACTICES IN NORTH CAROLINA



The [North Carolina Campus Compact](#) and Food Lion Feeds partnered in March 2020 to offer gift cards to help keep on-campus food pantries and toiletry closets stocked. The program has provided \$250 Food Lion gift cards to 13 campuses. They also host the [Collegiate Hunger Challenge](#), offering up to \$22,000 in cash prizes to campuses across the state to support efforts to address food insecurity both on- and off-campus.



[Single Stop](#) partners with community colleges to connect recipients to food stamps, local food pantries, and other resources to help meet their basic needs. In North Carolina, Single Stop has offices at two universities and eight community colleges.



The [Campus Pantry Collaborative \(CPC\)](#) is a collaborative network where food pantries on the Duke University, UNC Chapel Hill, Durham Tech, North Carolina Central University, and North Carolina State University campuses work together to share best practices and advocate for a reduction of food insecurity-related issues. The student-led collaborative has hosted two [Campus Food Insecurity Symposiums](#) with topics addressing structural racism and food insecurity, the impacts of COVID-19, and strategic planning to combat food insecurity for campuses.



[Swipe Out Hunger](#) is a national organization partnered with Elon University, UNC Charlotte, and North Carolina State University to allow students to donate their additional meal passes to be redistributed to other students on-campus facing food insecurity.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Students need short- and long-term solutions and investments to meet their basic needs and be empowered to succeed in a postsecondary education setting, both at an institutional level and through public policy efforts.

INSTITUTION LEVEL

Conduct a systematic analysis of food insecurity on campuses to identify student needs and assess the efficacy of current efforts and resources available.

Establish a working group or task force to coordinate and oversee cross-campus initiatives.

Provide a **basic meal guarantee** as part of a student's financial aid package.

Establish programs to promote food security

including: food pantries, meal donations, grocery store gift cards, food recovery programs, campus community gardens, and expanding emergency grant and food scholarship programs.

STATE LEVEL

Expand SNAP eligibility by: aligning SNAP eligibility with need-based financial aid eligibility, removing the logistical barriers to filing a SNAP application, and allowing college enrollment to count toward SNAP work requirements and removing the work requirement for full-time students.

Reform state appropriations to eliminate gaps in funding for community colleges. Plans should include provisions to address resource equity gaps, not just replace tuition revenue.

Require colleges and universities to convene a **governing body to address student hunger** and **develop criteria for IHEs to be designated "hunger-free campuses."**

Incentivize changes that would allow for SNAP purchases to be made at on-campus retailers.

Provide funding or technical assistance for the creation of on-campus food pantries, food recovery programs, or dining center meal donation programs.



WHAT SOME STATES ARE DOING

The [Michigan State University Food Bank](#), founded in 1993, was the first student-led food bank in the country. Today, the food bank is a non-profit partnered with the Greater Lansing Food Bank serving over 6,000 students year-round.

The University of California at Santa Cruz's [Cowell Coffee Shop: For the Peoples](#) is a non-transactional café serving coffee, tea, snacks, and prepared meals free of charge for any student. The café receives funding through donations and the UC Office of the President. They also offer CalFresh (SNAP) advising. They will soon launch a mobile food hub that will serve lunch, distribute produce, and offer food across campus at special events and workshops.

In Virginia, [HB1820](#) passed both chambers of the legislature and is awaiting the Governor's signature. If signed, this bill would establish broad-based categorical eligibility for SNAP applicants in postsecondary settings.

In 2017, Illinois introduced legislation ([SB-0351](#)) that would align SNAP eligibility with need-based financial aid eligibility for part-time students.

In 2017, California passed legislation ([AB-214](#)) to clarify educational policies to improve student access to the CalFresh program.

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In 2019, New Jersey Governor Murphy signed [legislation to address food insecurity](#) including: \$1 million appropriations to establish the Hunger-Free Campus Act grant program to address food insecurity in public IHEs, establish a food desert produce pilot program, and establish "Anti-Hunger Link" to promote emergency food services among others.

In 2018, Ohio University took steps to address hunger on-campus by [enabling one of their retailers to accept SNAP benefits](#).

In 2018, New York Governor Cuomo proposed [legislation](#) to ensure healthy food options are available on all college campuses and require all public IHE campuses to either provide physical food pantries on campus or enable students to receive food through a separate, stigma-free arrangement. The governor proposed a \$1 million state investment for implementation of this program.

In 2019, California Governor Newsom proposed [\\$15 million](#) in ongoing general funds to address food and housing insecurity at the University of California system.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

FEDERAL LEVEL

Increase access to public benefits by **expanding eligibility** for the federal SNAP and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) to include food insecure college students. This would allow the seven million Pell Grant recipients across all public and private IHEs to qualify for food assistance.

Extend the [Consolidated Appropriations Act 2021](#), which temporarily expands SNAP eligibility to include students enrolled at least half-time in an IHE, who either:

- Are eligible to participate in **state or federally financed work study** during the regular school year, as determined by the IHE, or
- Have an expected family contribution (EFC) of \$0 in the current academic year.

Require federal data collection on postsecondary food and housing insecurity and develop guidelines and criteria for states and IHEs to address and meet students' basic needs.

Provide federal grants to bolster institutional operating support and resource allocation based on student need.

Beginning in fall 2020, the federal government will [include questions to assess the security of students' basic needs](#) in the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study.

