



#REALCOLLEGE™

Guide to Assessing Basic Needs Insecurity in Higher Education

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THE **hope** CENTER

For College, Community, and Justice

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INTRODUCTION

Basic needs security is a critical component of collegiate success, one discounted by high school grades and standardized test scores. If a student has not eaten or slept enough the night before a class or an exam, they can have difficulty mastering the material or performing well.^a

There is growing evidence that food and housing insecurity affect the well-being of thousands of undergraduates across the country, hurting their chances to complete degrees. Our most recent study surveyed 86,000 students at both two- and four-year colleges and found widespread basic needs insecurity. Forty-two percent were food insecure, 46% were housing insecure, and 12% were homeless. At four-year colleges, 36% were food insecure, 36% were housing insecure, and 9% were homeless.^b Other studies have yielded similar results.^c

Assessing food and housing insecurity among students may help answer questions such as:

1. How many students could benefit from additional resources like campus food pantries, emergency aid, or crisis housing?
2. Which types of students ought to be flagged for additional outreach by early alert systems?
3. To what extent should the security of students' basic needs become a campus priority?

This guide outlines how to conduct your own survey to assess basic needs security at your institution.

As you read this guide, please keep in mind that basic needs security among college students is an emergent field, and many of the best practices are still developing. One of the most difficult questions is how best to assess whether students' basic needs are being met. The most effective assessments will include the entire student body and have the support of institutional administrators. The survey items and analysis recommendations in this guide may evolve as researchers better understand how students experience and communicate material hardships.

Use survey results from your own institution or The Hope Center's national reports to:

- Identify trends in students' basic needs on your campus and across the nation
- Guide campus decision-making about key investments to support students
- Generate new ideas to improve degree completion rates
- Evaluate basic needs programming to ensure it's effective

What Do We Mean by Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity, and Homelessness?

Food insecurity is the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or the ability to acquire such foods in a socially acceptable manner. The most extreme form is often accompanied by physiological sensations of hunger.

Housing insecurity includes the broader set of challenges, such as the inability to pay rent or utilities, or the need to move frequently.

Homelessness means that a person has no permanent place to live, often residing in a shelter, in an automobile, in an abandoned building, or on the street.

DEFINING AND ASSESSING BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY

An individual's basic needs begin with food, water, shelter, and safety; assessments of basic needs security in higher education must therefore focus not just on homelessness but also on measuring food and housing *insecurity*.

Accurately assessing basic needs security requires validated, standardized measures that are respected by the scientific, policy, and advocacy communities. This is easier to do with food security, where measures are widely agreed upon; with housing insecurity, there is more controversy over appropriate measurement. In the next section, we provide the measures employed by the Hope Center and other researchers studying higher education and recommend their use to facilitate national comparisons.

USING EXISTING DATA ON BASIC NEEDS SECURITY

When considering whether your institution should conduct local research, we recommend you first explore whether existing national data can meet your needs. The Hope Center report [*College and University Basic Needs Insecurity: A #RealCollege Survey Report*](#) assesses basic needs security of 86,000 students at 123 institutions (two- and four-year colleges).

If you decide conducting your own survey is best, remember that your survey methodology may not match national survey methodology, so local data should not be compared with national findings.

GATHERING DATA ON BASIC NEEDS SECURITY

College transcripts and financial aid applications provide little information about students' basic needs. Student surveys are the best way to assess how many students experience food and housing insecurity. However, successfully fielding a high-quality survey requires getting the right people involved, recruiting students, ensuring privacy protections for participants, asking good questions, identifying appropriate samples, analyzing data, and writing up the results. Here are some common questions about how to conduct those surveys:^d

Getting started: What is involved in fielding a basic needs security survey, and who should do it?

The group conducting the survey needs access to accurate contact information for students and an understanding of how to field a survey. It is also valuable if the resources exist to offer incentives to participating students. This guide is intended to help you field the survey but we always encourage institutions to partner with professional researchers if possible. It is also important, regardless of who fields the survey, to first gain institutional “buy-in,” ensuring that the survey is aligned with institutional goals. For these reasons, your college’s institutional research (IR) office is often best-equipped to lead such efforts, in concert with professional researchers. We recommend students and staff work with the IR office if possible.

Following the rules: What legal permissions are needed in order to do a basic needs security survey?

To protect students, you may need to secure the approval of your college’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) before surveys are conducted. Every IRB has its own procedures, so please consult them for more specific information.

Your survey’s purpose can determine your need for IRB approval:

- If the survey is led by an employee of the college or university and survey results will only be used to better serve students, it may not be necessary to get students’ consent or IRB approval.
- However, if the data are being collected for public reporting (e.g., publications or conference presentations) or for more general research purposes, then students’ consent may be necessary and all proper legal channels should be employed.

Be sure to provide the following information to the IRB:

- Your intent to survey students
- The goal(s) of your survey—is it strictly to improve services for students at the institution, or do you intend to use the data to generalize beyond your own institution, building knowledge in the field?
- Whether and how you intend to share the results (e.g., in an internal campus report or in a published research paper)

Your IRB will provide more detailed information when you contact them.

Participants: Which—and how many—students should be included in a basic needs security survey?

Generally, there are two approaches to determining who to survey:

- **Full Population.** If your basic needs security assessment aims to describe the prevalence of food and housing insecurity on campus, then the full population of enrolled students should be included in the survey. To do this, you should use a list of enrolled students provided by your institution, rather than recruiting students using tables on campus or other methods driven by convenience. This is critical to ensuring that students surveyed are representative of students on campus. If the assessment focuses on a specific group—for example, undergraduates only—it should be administered to everyone in that group.
- **Target Sample.** If resources are limited, focusing on a smaller sample of students may be necessary. Using a smaller sample requires additional expertise, initial information, and more time to devote to the sampling process so the result provides useful information.⁹ We recommend identifying groups of students who might be at risk of basic needs insecurity then drawing samples from those groups. Simply sampling a smaller group of students at random is strongly inadvisable, since the resulting group may include too few members in key subgroups of interest. This is a “stratified sampling strategy.”

Example: A large university wishes to survey 1,000 students and is especially concerned about Pell Grant recipients (40% of its students). The researcher must first divide the total student body into two groups (Pell recipients and non-Pell recipients). Next, the researcher should randomly select 400 Pell recipients and 600 non-Pell recipients to ensure the proportion of Pell recipients in the survey sample matches the proportion in the total student body.



When target sampling, it is important to ensure that enough students are included so that the sample accurately represents the prevalence of basic needs security on campus. This technique is somewhat advanced and we would strongly recommend engaging a researcher to assist if you determine this is your sampling approach.

- **Response Rate.**—One major determinant of how many people you need to survey is the share of students you expect to respond (i.e., your expected response rate). If you can convince most students to take the survey, then you can send it to fewer people. But if, like at many colleges and universities, expected response rates are low, then you’ll need to survey many students and provide resources to track down those who do not respond. There’s a bit of math involved to figure out how many students you need to get your response rates. For example, if you have 10,000 students on campus and want to be at least 95% sure that your evaluation is on target, then you should aim to get at least 400 students to take the survey—which likely requires contacting at least 4,000 students given response rates at 10%.^f In the next section we discuss ways to maximize response rates

on your survey. Without providing incentives to students, such as a gift card, you should anticipate low response rates, from 5% to 10%. Make the compensation as flexible as possible. Students have needs that go beyond books and tuition.

- **Confidence Level.**—The number of students who participate in a survey influences how confident you can be estimating the prevalence of basic needs security on campus. Researchers typically ask “how confident are you that you would obtain the same survey results if you repeated the survey 100 times under the same conditions?” If someone is confident that their data would be the same 90 out of 100 times, they would have a 90% confidence level. If you require more certainty, you would need more students to complete survey.

Key Terms

Response rate is the number of people who answered a survey divided by the number of people who received an invitation to take the survey. This is related to who at your institution your survey represents and can lead to bias.

Bias results when a sample statistic is systematically different from the actual value in the overall population. For example, a homelessness statistic from a college survey will be biased if the students answering the survey are more likely to be homeless than students in the overall college population.

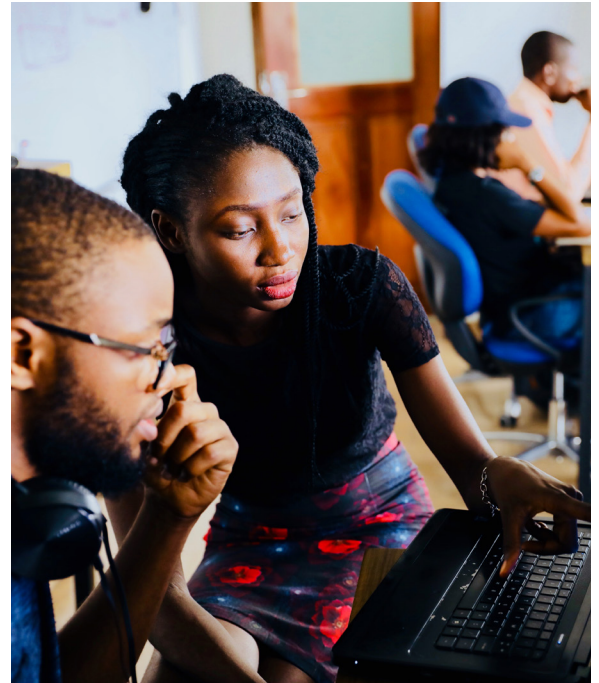


Recruitment: How should we recruit students to a basic needs security survey?

It can be difficult to get students to take surveys, particularly online surveys, which are often the only feasible option given scant resources. Since estimates of basic needs security on campus depend on who completes the survey, it's important to do everything you can to maximize response rates—in other words, to get the students you survey to answer the questions.

But **what you cannot do, without potentially biasing the results, is recruit for the survey by talking about hunger and homelessness on campus or urge people to take the survey because you think they are at risk.** This would likely lead to results that overstate how common these issues are on your campus. For example, avoid:

- Engaging in surveys near programs focused on food insecurity, such as a campus food pantry
- Calling out food or housing insecurity in recruitment materials, such as hashtags or phrases referencing student hunger
- Advertising surveys as part of campus-wide initiatives to address basic needs insecurity



Instead, administer the survey as an effort to generally understand how students are doing, and treat every student the same when fielding the survey. When designing a successful recruitment process, include the following steps:

- **Design a great invitation to the survey.** Appeal to the students' sense of social responsibility, to their peers and their college (see Sample Recruitment Letter in Appendix D). Campus basic needs assessments are often undertaken as a component of a larger strategy to help students graduate. When students understand that taking the survey will directly inform a graduation improvement strategy and the lives of their friends and colleagues, they are more likely to respond.
- **Provide incentives.** Ideally, every student would be offered a little money up front and a payment for doing the survey. When this compensation is not possible, consider raffling gift cards, iPads, etc. Check with your campus's IR office for ideas and reach out to your institution's foundation for support. Information from the basic needs security survey can be successfully leveraged for fundraising purposes; your institution's development department or foundation may consider it a good investment to support efforts to get students' responses.

Administration: How should we administer a basic needs security survey and what should it ask?

Surveys can be administered in a variety of ways, including by phone, email or regular mail; on the web; or in person. Each form has benefits and drawbacks in terms of relative data quality, level of student response, and cost. Web-based surveys are generally the most effective and inexpensive way to gather student data for campus basic needs security assessments. Online survey software such as Qualtrics or Survey Monkey can simplify both survey creation and administration and are often free to colleges.^g

MEASURING RATES OF FOOD AND HOUSING INSECURITY

To compare the basic food and housing needs of students on your campus to the needs of students elsewhere, we recommend frequently used survey measures. The Appendix contains specific information on food and housing insecurity survey measures. Below, we briefly describe common survey measures for assessing basic needs:

- **Food Insecurity.** It is important to note that while we discuss food insecurity, the standard is to measure the level of security, referring to those with low or medium security as “food insecure.” We recommend that you assess food security using the six-, 10-, or 18-question survey of food security approved by the USDA. Generally speaking, the questions included in these surveys address students’ access to food, the quality of the food available to them, and how often the students experienced hunger. The USDA recommends using the 10-question survey^h, although the six-question survey has been shown to give similar results.ⁱ You should choose the survey that best fits your context and the space available in your surveys. The questions can refer to either the prior 30 days or the prior 12 months, and that timeframe should be considered when deciding survey distribution.^j This survey is most appropriate for students without children, and an alternative survey with additional questions may be used for students who are parents.^k Please see Appendix A for the modules of food insecurity.
- **Housing Insecurity and Homelessness.** There is widespread debate over the best way to measure housing security, particularly homelessness.^l One challenge is that housing security can take somewhat different forms depending on age and circumstances. For homeless youth, we suggest a more inclusive definition of housing. We recommend using a series of survey questions adapted from the national Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) Adult Well-Being Module to measure students’ access to and ability to pay for safe and reliable housing.^m This series of survey questions asks about students’ housing circumstances (in the past month or year), whether they experienced a recent move, and their ability to pay for their housing. For measuring homelessness among college students, we recommend a series of survey questions developed by Crutchfield and Maguire (2017) that are based on definitions of homelessness adopted by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Department of Education.ⁿ This series of survey questions asks students if they experienced homelessness (in the past month or year) and where they have slept (e.g., in campus housing, at a shelter, or temporarily with a relative or friend).

For housing insecurity and homelessness, we recommend surveying students on their experiences in both the prior 30 days and the prior 12 months. Students who indicate housing insecurity or homelessness within the prior 30 days may be more insecure than students who indicate insecurity within the prior 12 months. Surveying students on both time periods provides a more nuanced measure of students' needs. Students may have answers to both sections so we do not recommend skipping either module. Please see Appendix B for the housing security module.

Ask questions about who your students are. Unless you plan to connect your survey to administrative data, you will need to ask questions about who takes your survey. Focus on attributes that influence how students fare in college, like gender, race, age, marital status, number of children, Pell-eligibility status, and first-generation status.

You might also consider academic information such as enrollment level and year in college. You will use these answers not only to describe who took your survey but also to explore food and housing insecurity across different types of students at your institution. If you are able to link your survey to administrative data, you may not need to ask all of these questions, but we still encourage you to ask some of the ones that may be more nuanced than administrative data would represent, such as gender, race, etc.

Analysis: How should we analyze and report on the results of a basic needs security survey?

When students complete the survey, begin by looking at how many responded, and in particular, how many responded to the questions on food and housing insecurity versus other questions you may have included. Here are some suggested steps to analyze the data:

1. **Look at who took the survey.** Are the respondents representative of the entire student body? Find ways to compare them, for example by checking their self-reported demographic and academic characteristics against campus averages. Write up a description of what you learn. If some groups are overrepresented or underrepresented in your survey sample, make a note of that. It may be possible to use “survey weights” to adjust the results so that they are more representative of the full student body, and we encourage you to find on-campus experts (faculty or staff) able to help you do that. At a minimum, you should acknowledge the “representativeness” of your survey in your reporting.
2. **Calculate rates of insecurity.** Using the modules you included in your questions, you can calculate rates of food and housing insecurity with some basic math.
 - **Food Security.** To calculate a raw score, tally the number of questions to which a student answers affirmatively. (See table on next page.) We remind the reader that this domain measures food security, not insecurity. Once security is assessed, insecurity is identified based on the level of security.
 - “Often true” and “sometimes true” should both be counted as affirmative answers.
 - Answers of three days or more should be counted as a “yes” in the 30-day version.
 - Answers of “almost every month” and “some months but not every month” should be counted as a “yes” in the 12-month version. Translate the raw score into food security levels as follows:

Defining Levels of Food Security by Number of USDA Questions Used

Raw Score				Food Security Level
18 questions (children present)	18 questions (no children present)	10 questions	6 questions	Instrument-Type
0	0	0	0	High
1–2	1–2	1–2	1	Marginal
3–7	3–5	3–5	2–4	Low
8–18	6–10	6–10	5–6	Very Low

- Housing Insecurity and Homelessness.** Students are counted as housing insecure if they answered yes to any of the nine housing insecurity questions in the Housing Insecurity Module in Appendix B. Similarly, students are counted as homeless if they answered affirmatively to question one or any of question two, parts e through m of the Homelessness Module in Appendix B.

- 3. Examine the relationship between student characteristics and insecurity.** When assessing food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness, it can be useful to also ask additional questions to help contextualize the responses. For example, the survey might include information about whether a student works, receives financial aid, or avails themselves of support such as campus food pantries. Examples of those questions and the sorts of analyses that could be conducted can be found in the reports and books from the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice that are listed at the end of this guide.

As you write up the results from your campus basic needs survey, consider calculating food and housing insecurity status for both the full sample and demographic subgroups such as race/ethnicity, first-generation status, or Pell eligibility. By disaggregating your survey data, you can address questions like:

- Do students who are food insecure receive financial aid?
- Do they work?
- Do Pell recipients have greater housing insecurity than non-Pell students?



4. Prepare the report.

When preparing your report, you should consider including the following components:

- **Survey details.** Regardless of whether your report is distributed internally or made available publicly, be sure to include key details on how you conducted the survey, who participated, what incentives were provided, etc. Such information is critical for readers trying to interpret the results. Include information not only on how many students responded, but how many were surveyed, and include the results of your analysis on how those groups differ.
- **Reference points.** To help readers interpret your survey findings, you may wish to reference prior studies of basic needs security at other institutions or compare your results with those at similar institutions. The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice maintaining a useful compilation of studies for that purpose. Find the annotated bibliography [on our website](#).

Sharing Your Findings: How can we effectively disseminate the results of a basic needs security survey?

When made publicly available, results from surveys on student food and housing insecurity can be effective tools for motivating federal, state, and institutional policy changes aimed at helping struggling students. Therefore, it can be valuable for survey results to reach as wide an audience as possible.

Please keep in mind that your discussion with the IRB office earlier in the research process will impact how widely you are legally able to share your results.

Successful dissemination strategies include:

- Sharing results with key audiences on campus, such as administrators, student support services offices, financial aid, and student government, that are well positioned to address food and housing issues
- Preparing a press release, contacting local education reporters, and sharing on social media
- Publishing studies in academic journals that reach a large community of researchers, all of whom can learn from, and build on, individual findings

CONCLUSION

We hope these resources prove useful in your efforts to address basic needs security in higher education. Here are several additional supports for your work:

- If you require additional assistance conducting surveys or constructing more rigorous program evaluations, please reach out to the [Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice](#) for help.
- To aid in producing comparisons between institution-specific data and national trends, the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice has published [an annotated bibliography of extant studies](#) to date.
- For assistance in developing a campus food pantry, please contact the [College and University Food Bank Alliance](#).



APPENDIX

Appendix A: Food Security Module

USDA Food Security Survey Question Module: 18-Item Household Food Security Survey Module (Please note the USDA 10-item Adult Food Security Survey Module consists of the first 10 items (Adult Stages 1, 2, and 3) of the 18-item Household Food Security Survey Module.) The six-item module follows in a subsection.

ADULT STAGE 1

1. “I worried whether my food would run out before I got money to buy more.” Was that often true, sometimes true, or never true for you in the last 30 days (12 months)?
2. “The food that I bought just didn’t last, and I didn’t have money to get more.” Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 30 days (12 months)?
3. “I couldn’t afford to eat balanced meals.” Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 30 days (12 months)?

IF THE RESPONDENT ANSWERS “OFTEN TRUE” OR “SOMETIMES TRUE” TO ANY OF THE THREE QUESTIONS IN ADULT STAGE 1, THEN PROCEED TO ADULT STAGE 2.

ADULT STAGE 2 (YES/NO QUESTIONS)

4. In the last 30 days (12 months, since last (name of current month)), did you ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn’t enough money for food?
5. [IF YES TO QUESTION 4, ASK]
If using the 30-day version: In the last 30 days, how many days did this happen?
If using the 12-month version: How often did this happen—almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only one or two months?
6. In the last 30 days (12 months), did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn’t enough money for food?
7. In the last 30 days (12 months), were you ever hungry but didn’t eat because there wasn’t enough money for food?
8. In the last 30 days (12 months), did you lose weight because there wasn’t enough money for food?

IF THE RESPONDENT ANSWERS “YES” TO ANY OF THE QUESTIONS IN ADULT STAGE 2, THEN PROCEED TO ADULT STAGE 3

ADULT STAGE 3

9. In the last 30 days (12 months), did you ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn’t enough money for food?
10. [IF YES TO QUESTION 9, ASK]
If using the 30-day version: In the last 30 days, how many days did this happen?
If using the 12-month version: How often did this happen—almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only one or two months?

IF THE RESPONDENT HAS INDICATED THAT CHILDREN UNDER 18 ARE PRESENT IN THE HOUSEHOLD, THEN PROCEED TO CHILD STAGE 1:

CHILD STAGE 1

11. "I relied on only a few kinds of low-cost food to feed my children because I was running out of money to buy food." Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 30 days (12 months)?
12. "I couldn't feed my children a balanced meal, because I couldn't afford that." Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 30 days (12 months)?
13. "My child was not eating enough because I just couldn't afford enough food." Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 30 days (12 months)?

IF THE RESPONDENT ANSWERS "OFTEN TRUE" OR "SOMETIMES TRUE" TO ANY OF THE THREE QUESTIONS IN CHILD STAGE 1, THEN PROCEED TO CHILD STAGE 2.

CHILD STAGE 2

14. In the last 30 days (12 months), did you ever cut the size of your children's meals because there wasn't enough money for food?
15. In the last 30 days (12 months), did your children ever skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?
16. [IF YES TO QUESTION 15, ASK]
If using the 30-day version: In the last 30 days, how many days did this happen?
If using the 12-month version: How often did this happen—almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only one or two months?
17. In the last 30 days (12 months), were your children ever hungry but you just couldn't afford more food?
18. In the last 30 days (12 months), did any of your children ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food?

USDA Food Security Survey Module: Six-Item Short Form^o

1. "The food that I bought just didn't last, and I didn't have money to get more." Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 30 days (12 months)?
2. "I couldn't afford to eat balanced meals." Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 30 days (12 months)?
3. In the last 30 days (12 months), did you ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?
4. [IF YES TO QUESTION 3, ASK]
If using the 30-day version: In the last 30 days, how many days did this happen?
If using the 12-month version: How often did this happen—almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only one or two months?
5. In the last 30 days (12 months), did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?
6. In the last 30 days (12 months), were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?

Appendix B: Housing Insecurity and Homelessness Modules

Housing Insecurity Module (Yes/No Questions)

1. In the past 30 days (12 months), was there a rent or mortgage increase that made it difficult to pay?^P
2. In the past 30 days (12 months), did you not pay or underpay your rent or mortgage?
3. In the past 30 days (12 months), did you not pay the full amount of a gas, oil, or electricity bill?
4. In the past 30 days (12 months), have you moved three times or more?
5. In the past 30 days (12 months), did you move in with other people, even for a little while, because of financial problems?
6. In the past 30 days (12 months), did you live with others beyond the expected capacity of the house or apartment?
7. In the past 30 days (12 months), have you received a summons to appear in housing court?
8. In the past 30 days (12 months), did you have an account default or go into collections?
9. In the past 30 days (12 months), did you leave your household because you felt unsafe?

Homelessness Module (Yes/No Questions)

1. In the past 30 days (12 months), have you ever been homeless?
2. In the past 30 days (12 months), have you slept in any of the following places? Please check all that apply:
 - a) Campus or university housing
 - b) Sorority/fraternity house
 - c) In a rented or owned house, mobile home, or apartment (alone or with roommates or friends)
 - d) In a rented or owned house, mobile home, or apartment with my family (parent, guardian, or relative)
 - e) At a shelter
 - f) In a camper
 - g) Temporarily staying with a relative, friend, or couch surfing until I find other housing
 - h) Temporarily at a hotel or motel without a permanent home to return to (not on vacation or business travel)
 - i) In transitional housing or an independent living program
 - j) At a group home such as halfway house or residential program for mental health or substance abuse
 - k) At a treatment center (such as detox, hospital, etc.)
 - l) Outdoor location (such as street, sidewalk, or alley; bus or train stop; campground or woods; park, beach, or riverbed; under bridge or overpass; or other)
 - m) In a closed area/space with a roof not meant for human habitation (such as abandoned building; car, truck, van, RV, or camper; encampment or tent; unconverted garage, attic, or basement; etc.)

Appendix C: Other Survey Questions Used in the Hope Center's #RealCollege Survey

I. Let's begin by learning about your college experiences

1. As of today, which college or university do you attend? (answers will be by dropdown options)
2. As of today, are you attending college full-time or part-time?
 - a) Full-time (at least 12 credits)
 - b) Part-time (less than 12 credits) How many years have you been in college?
3. Thinking about the past academic year, which of the following best describes your grades?
 - a) A
 - b) B
 - c) C
 - d) D
 - e) F
 - f) No grade or don't know

II. How you pay for college

Transition text: Next let's talk about how you are working to make ends meet.

4. Which of the following ways do you pay for the expenses associated with attending college? (check all that apply)
 - a) I have a work-study job
 - b) I work at a job that isn't a work-study job (including self-employment)
 - c) I get the Pell Grant
 - d) I get other grants from the federal or state government
 - e) I get a grant from my college or university
 - f) I take out student loans
 - g) I get help from family or friends
 - h) I use savings
 - i) I use credit cards
 - j) My employer pays
 - k) Other _____

If selected a or b for Q4 then

5. About how many hours do you generally work each week (include all your jobs)? (answers will be by dropdown options)
6. Thinking about the job at which you work the most hours: approximately how much does this job pay? You can tell us your pay by hour, week, month, or year. (open end box for amount, with a drop down next to it that respondent can choose per hour, per week, per month, or per year)

If didn't select a or b for Q4, then

7. In the past 30 days have you been looking for work?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No

III. Your economic experiences

Transition: Now we'd like to learn a bit about what your life is like these days.

8. In the past 12 months, from which of the following programs did you receive assistance? (check all that apply)
- a) SNAP (food stamps)
 - b) WIC (nutritional assistance for pregnant women and children)
 - c) TANF (public cash assistance; formerly called ADC or ADFC)
 - d) SSI (supplemental security income)
 - e) SSDI (social security disability income)
 - f) Medicaid or public health insurance
 - g) Child care assistance
 - h) Unemployment compensation/insurance
 - i) Utility assistance (e.g., help paying for heat or water)
 - j) Housing assistance
 - k) Transportation assistance
 - l) Tax refunds (including EITC)
 - m) Veterans benefits (Veteran's Administration benefits for a serviceman's, widow's, or survivor's pension; service disability, or the GI bill)
9. Is your home in a public housing project owned by a local housing authority or other public agency?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
10. Do you receive a public housing voucher, such as Section 8, to subsidize the cost of private housing?
- a) Yes
 - b) No

IV. About you

Transition: Finally, just a few more questions about yourself.

11. What is your gender? (Check all that apply)
- a) Female
 - b) Male
 - c) Non-binary/third gender
 - d) Prefer to self-describe
 - e) Prefer not to answer
12. Do you identify as transgender?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Prefer not to answer
13. What is your sexual orientation?
- a) Heterosexual or straight
 - b) Gay or lesbian
 - c) Bisexual
 - d) Prefer to self-describe
 - e) Prefer not to answer
14. In what year were you born? (answers will be by dropdown)

15. What is the highest level of education completed by either of your parents/guardians?
- a) Eighth grade or lower
 - b) Between 9th and 12th grade (but no high school diploma)
 - c) High school diploma
 - d) GED
 - e) Some college (but no college degree)
 - f) College certificate or diploma
 - g) Associate's degree
 - h) Bachelor's degree
 - i) Graduate degree
 - j) Don't know
 - k) Prefer not to answer
16. How do you usually describe your race and/or ethnicity? (Select all that apply)
- a) White or Caucasian
 - b) African American or Black
 - c) Hispanic or Latinx
 - d) American Indian or Alaskan Native
 - e) Middle Eastern or North African or Arab or Arab American
 - f) Southeast Asian
 - g) Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian
 - h) Other Asian or Asian-American
 - i) Other (please specify)
 - j) Prefer not to answer
17. In the last year, did a parent or guardian claim you as a "dependent" for tax purposes?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Don't know
 - d) Prefer not to answer
18. How would you describe your current relationship status?
- a) Single
 - b) In a relationship
 - c) Married or domestic partnership
 - d) Divorced
 - e) Widowed
 - f) Prefer not to answer
19. Do you have a spouse or partner who lives with you?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Prefer not to answer
20. Do you have any biological, adopted, step or foster children?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
21. If yes, then:
Please indicate the number of biological, adopted, step, or foster children you have
22. Are you a U.S. citizen or permanent resident?
- a) Yes
 - b) No

- c) Prefer not to answer
23. Have you ever served in the U.S. Armed Forces, Military Reserves, or National Guard?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) I prefer not to answer
24. Have you ever been in foster care?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Prefer not to answer
25. When you were growing up (about age 12), did your family have trouble “making ends meet” with the available finances?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) I don’t know
 - d) Prefer not to answer
26. Thinking back to the last full week that began on a Monday and ended on a Sunday, for about how many total hours and minutes did you spend doing each of the following activities?
- If you did not do an activity during the last full week, please enter “0” hours and “0” minutes.***
- a) Working for pay
 - b) Commuting to or from work or school
 - c) Sleeping
 - d) Leisure activities (for example, spending time with friends, watching TV or movies, using the internet for leisure, talking or texting on the phone)
 - e) Taking care of a child or adult family member
 - f) Attending college classes, labs, or discussion sections either in person or online
 - g) Preparing for class by yourself or with others by studying, reading, writing, rehearsing, or doing other academic activities
27. Do you have any of the following disabilities or medical conditions?
- a) Learning disability (dyslexia, etc.)
 - b) Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
 - c) Autism spectrum disorder
 - d) Physical disability (speech, sight, mobility, hearing, etc.)
 - e) Chronic illness (asthma, diabetes, autoimmune disorders, cancer, etc.)
 - f) Psychological disorder (depression, anxiety, etc.)
 - g) Other: (fill in)
28. Are you a student-athlete on a team sponsored by your institution’s athletics department?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Prefer not to answer

Appendix D: Sample Email Text

Subject: Real talk: We need your help

From: email address [someone students “know” at COLLEGE NAME]

[COLLEGE LETTERHEAD FOR EMAIL]

Dear [student first name],

Let’s get real. You’re the expert when it comes to what’s happening in college. So we need your help to make [COLLEGE NAME] the best it can be for you and your friends.

Share your real talk in the #RealCollege survey. We chose you simply because you attend [COLLEGE NAME]. In appreciation, you can win \$100 for completing the survey.

Click here to share your story. [SURVEY LINKED HERE]

Be honest— everything you say is confidential. If you have questions, send us a note at hopesrvy@temple.edu.

Thank you.

Sara Goldrick-Rab, Founding Director
Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice

ENDNOTES

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- ^d For more details on survey creation and administration methods, see Walston, J., Redford, J., & Bhatt, M. P. (2017). *Workshop on survey methods in education research: facilitator's guide and resources*. Institute of Education Sciences Midwest Regional Educational Laboratory at American Institutes for Research. Retrieved from https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midwest/pdf/REL_2017214.pdf
- ^e Since we have had very limited resources with which to conduct national surveys, and institutions are unwilling to provide the information needed to construct effective subsamples, Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice surveys have always been administered to the full population of enrolled students.
- ^f Survey Monkey. (2017). Calculating the Number of Responses You Need. Retrieved from https://help.surveymonkey.com/articles/en_US/kb/How-many-respondents-do-I-need
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- ⁱ Blumberg, S. J., Bialostosky, K., Hamilton, W. L., & Briefel, R. R. (1999). The effectiveness of a short form of the household food security scale. *American Journal of Public Health*, 89, 1231-1234.
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^p Students who indicate housing insecurity in the past 30 days may be more insecure than students who indicate insecurity only in the past 12 months. Surveying students on both time periods provides a more nuanced measure of student need.