



September 2020

# Housing and Food Insecurity at Portland State University

A report by:

**The Portland State University Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative**

Authors:

Greg Townley, Katricia Stewart, Jacen Greene, and Marta Petteni

# Acknowledgements

We are grateful to so many for their support of this work. First and foremost, a sincere thank you to the students and employees of Portland State University who gave their time to complete the survey and to share their important stories with us. We hope this work makes a difference.

Thanks to the Office of Institutional Research and Planning at PSU who provided valuable assistance at all stages of this project.

Many others provided input and support that was critical to our survey design, data analysis, interpretation of findings, communications, and outreach. In particular, we are grateful to (in alphabetical order) Holly Brott, Julie Caron, Mckinsey Carroll, Brenda Eichelberger, Cory Elia, Angela Hamilton, Mary Haskett, Tania Hoode, K Keith, Stefanie Knowlton, Devan Kochersperger, Uma Krishnan, Emily Leickly, Kara Lise Miller, Motutama Sipelii, Michele Toppe, and Marisa Zapata.

Funding from Portland State University and a philanthropic gift from Tim and Mary Boyle helped make this work possible.

---

Suggested citation: Townley, G., Stewart, K., Greene, J., & Petteni, M. (2020). *Housing and Food Insecurity at Portland State University*. Portland State University.

Interviews and Storytelling by Stefanie Knowlton

For questions about this report, please contact:  
Greg Townley ([gtownley@pdx.edu](mailto:gtownley@pdx.edu))

# Table of Contents

<b>List of Figures, Tables, and Stories .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Find Help .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Methodology .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Student Results .....</b>	<b>19</b>
• Prevalence of Basic Needs Insecurity Among Students .....	19
Student Housing Insecurity	
Student Homelessness	
Student Food Insecurity	
Intersections of Housing Insecurity, Homelessness, and Food Insecurity	
• Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurity .....	27
Race and Ethnicity	
Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation	
Disability or Medical Condition	
Additional Demographic Variables	
Student Life Experiences	
• Student Status and Academic Performance .....	36
• Employment and Finances .....	38
Employment Status	
How Students Pay for College	
Use of Assistance Programs	
Financial Stress	
• Health Indicators .....	48
Stress	
Physical and Mental Health Interferences	
Sleep	

• Social Connectedness and Belonging .....	51
Loneliness	
Campus Sense of Community	
• Student Explanations for Basic Needs Insecurity .....	53
Costs of Attending PSU	
Costs of Living	
<b>Employee Results .....</b>	<b>60</b>
• Prevalence of Basic Needs Insecurity Among Employees .....	60
Employee Housing Insecurity	
Employee Homelessness	
Employee Food Insecurity	
Intersections of Housing Insecurity, Homelessness, and Food Insecurity	
• Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurity .....	67
Race and Ethnicity	
Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation	
Disability or Medical Condition	
Additional Demographic Variables	
Employee Life Experiences	
• Employment and Finances .....	75
Employment Status at PSU	
Income and Other Employment	
Use of Assistance Programs	
Financial Stress	
• Health Indicators .....	82
Stress	
Physical and Mental Health Interferences	
Sleep	
• Social Connectedness and Belonging .....	85
Loneliness	
Campus Sense of Community	
• Employee Explanations for Basic Needs Insecurity .....	87
Income and Employment Structures	
Food and Housing Costs	

<b>COVID-19 Results .....</b>	<b>92</b>
• Basic Needs Insecurity During the Pandemic.....	92
• Student Housing Insecurity During the Pandemic .....	93
• Student Homelessness During the Pandemic .....	95
Impact of the Pandemic on Housing Insecurity and Homelessness	
• Student Food Insecurity During the Pandemic .....	98
Impact of the Pandemic on Food Insecurity	
• Racial Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurity Amplified by COVID .....	101
• Academic Challenges During the Pandemic .....	103
Impact of the Pandemic on Academic Plans	
• Job Security During the Pandemic .....	107
Impact of the Pandemic on Student Job Security	
• Financial Support During the Pandemic .....	111
Impact of the Pandemic on Student Finances	
• Social Life and Health During the Pandemic .....	114
Social Isolation	
Staying Connected	
Health Challenges	
Sleep	
Stress	
Impact of the Pandemic on Students' Social Lives and Health	
<b>Conclusions and Next Steps .....</b>	<b>124</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>128</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>131</b>
• Appendix A .....	131
• Appendix B .....	136
• Appendix C .....	141

# List of Figures, Tables, and Stories

## Figures

<b>Figure 1.</b> Students Who Experienced at Least One Form of Housing Insecurity in the Past 12 Months .....	19
<b>Figure 2.</b> Students Who Experienced Homelessness in the Past 30 Days or 12 Months .....	21
<b>Figure 3.</b> Students Who Experienced Food Insecurity in the Past 30 Days .....	23
<b>Figure 4.</b> Intersections of Housing Insecurity, Homelessness, and Food Insecurity Among PSU Students .....	25
<b>Figure 5.</b> Disparities in Student Basic Needs Insecurity by Disability or Medical Condition .....	29
<b>Figure 6.</b> Grade Point Average (GPA) According to Student Basic Needs Insecurity .....	36
<b>Figure 7.</b> Monthly Take-Home Pay Rates According to Student Basic Needs Insecurity .....	38
<b>Figure 8.</b> Most Commonly Used Types of Public Assistance According to Student Basic Needs Insecurity .....	44
<b>Figure 9.</b> Financial Stress Related to Financial Aid .....	45
<b>Figure 10.</b> Financial Stress According to Student Basic Needs Insecurity .....	46
<b>Figure 11.</b> Level of Stress According to Student Basic Needs Insecurity .....	48
<b>Figure 12.</b> Health Interferences According to Student Basic Needs Insecurity .....	49
<b>Figure 13.</b> Percentage of Students Who Slept Fewer than Seven Hours Per Night According to Basic Needs Insecurity .....	50
<b>Figure 14.</b> Loneliness According to Student Basic Needs Insecurity .....	51
<b>Figure 15.</b> Rates of Isolation Among Students with Basic Needs Insecurity .....	51
<b>Figure 16.</b> Employees Who Experienced at Least One Form of Housing Insecurity in the Past 12 Months .....	60
<b>Figure 17.</b> Employees Who Experienced Homelessness in the Past 30 Days or 12 Months .....	62
<b>Figure 18.</b> Employees Who Experienced Food Insecurity in the Past 30 Days .....	64
<b>Figure 19.</b> Intersections of Housing Insecurity, Homelessness, and Food Insecurity Among PSU Employees ..	66
<b>Figure 20.</b> Disparities in Employee Basic Needs Insecurity by Disability or Medical Condition .....	69
<b>Figure 21.</b> Monthly Take-Home Pay Rates According to Employee Basic Needs Insecurity .....	78
<b>Figure 22.</b> Most Commonly Used Types of Public Assistance According to Basic Needs Insecurity .....	80
<b>Figure 23.</b> Financial Stress Among Employees .....	81
<b>Figure 24.</b> Financial Stress According to Employee Basic Needs Insecurity .....	81
<b>Figure 25.</b> Level of Stress According to Employee Basic Needs Insecurity .....	82
<b>Figure 26.</b> Health Interferences According to Employee Basic Needs Insecurity .....	83
<b>Figure 27.</b> Percentage of Employees Who Slept Fewer than Seven Hours Per Night According to Basic Needs Insecurity .....	84
<b>Figure 28.</b> Loneliness According to Employee Basic Needs Insecurity .....	85
<b>Figure 29.</b> Rates of Isolation Among Employees with Basic Needs Insecurity .....	85
<b>Figure 30.</b> Students Who Experienced Housing Insecurity Since March 2020 .....	93
<b>Figure 31.</b> Students Who Experienced Homelessness in the Past 30 Days .....	95
<b>Figure 32.</b> Students Who Experienced Food Insecurity in the Past 30 Days .....	98
<b>Figure 33.</b> Racial Disparities in Students Who Had to Leave Housing During the Pandemic .....	102
<b>Figure 34.</b> Job Security During the Pandemic .....	107
<b>Figure 35.</b> Students Who Did Not Know About PSU Emergency Funds During the Pandemic .....	111
<b>Figure 36.</b> Percentage of Students Experiencing Social Isolation During the Pandemic According to Basic Needs Insecurity .....	114
<b>Figure 37.</b> Health Challenges During the Pandemic According to Basic Needs Insecurity .....	116
<b>Figure 38.</b> Percentage of Students Who Slept Fewer Than Seven Hours Per Night During the Pandemic According to Basic Needs Insecurity .....	117
<b>Figure 39.</b> Level of Stress During the Pandemic According to Basic Needs Insecurity .....	118

## Tables

<b>Table 1.</b> Housing Insecurity Among Students over the Past 12 Months .....	20
<b>Table 2.</b> Homelessness Among Students in the Past 30 Days and 12 Months .....	22
<b>Table 3.</b> Food Insecurity Among Students in the Past 30 Days .....	24
<b>Table 4.</b> Disparities in Student Basic Needs Insecurity by Race and Ethnicity .....	27
<b>Table 5.</b> Disparities in Student Basic Needs Insecurity by Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation .....	28
<b>Table 6.</b> Disparities in Student Basic Needs Insecurity by Disability or Medical Condition .....	30
<b>Table 7.</b> Disparities in Student Basic Needs Insecurity by Additional Demographic Variables .....	32
<b>Table 8.</b> Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurity by Student Life Experiences .....	33-34
<b>Table 9.</b> Student Status and Basic Needs Insecurity .....	37
<b>Table 10.</b> Employment Status and Student Basic Needs Insecurity .....	39
<b>Table 11.</b> Ways that Students Pay for College According to Basic Needs Insecurity .....	41
<b>Table 12.</b> Use of Public Assistance According to Student Basic Needs Insecurity .....	43
<b>Table 13.</b> Campus Sense of Community According to Student Basic Needs Insecurity .....	52
<b>Table 14.</b> Housing Insecurity Among Employees Over the Past 12 Months .....	61
<b>Table 15.</b> Homelessness Among Employees in the Past 30 Days and 12 Months .....	63
<b>Table 16.</b> Food Insecurity Among Employees in the Past 30 Days .....	65
<b>Table 17.</b> Disparities in Employee Basic Needs Insecurity by Race and Ethnicity .....	67
<b>Table 18.</b> Disparities in Employee Basic Needs Insecurity by Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation .....	68
<b>Table 19.</b> Disparities in Employee Basic Needs Insecurity by Disability or Medical Condition .....	70
<b>Table 20.</b> Disparities in Employee Basic Needs Insecurity by Additional Demographic Variables .....	72
<b>Table 21.</b> Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurity by Employee Life Experiences .....	73
<b>Table 22.</b> Employment Status and Employee Basic Needs Insecurity .....	76
<b>Table 23.</b> Working More than One Job and Employee Basic Needs Insecurity .....	77
<b>Table 24.</b> Use of Public Assistance According to Employee Basic Needs Insecurity .....	79
<b>Table 25.</b> Campus Sense of Community According to Employee Basic Needs Insecurity .....	86
<b>Table 26.</b> Housing Insecurity Among Students Since March 2020 .....	93
<b>Table 27.</b> Reasons Students had to Leave their Housing During the Pandemic .....	94
<b>Table 28.</b> Homelessness Among Students in the Past 30 Days .....	95
<b>Table 29.</b> Food Insecurity Among Students in the Past 30 Days .....	98
<b>Table 30.</b> Racial Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurity During the Pandemic .....	102
<b>Table 31.</b> Academic Difficulties Brought on by the Pandemic According to Basic Needs Insecurity .....	103
<b>Table 32.</b> Impact of the Pandemic on Academic Plans According to Basic Needs Insecurity .....	103
<b>Table 33.</b> Methods for Staying Socially Connected During the Pandemic .....	115
<b>Table 34.</b> Comparison of PSU Student Findings with Other State and National Surveys .....	124

## Stories

Homelessness as a child .....	26
Search for safety .....	35
A survivor's journey .....	47
Recovery .....	58
From student to employee .....	74
Not who you expect .....	90
Loss of stability due to COVID .....	110

# Find Help

This report addresses a difficult topic and many of the personal stories include traumatic experiences including assault and identity-based violence. If you have experienced similar events or are currently struggling with these experiences, know that you are not alone. Help is available.

## Crisis Support 24/7

- RAINN offers support to survivors of sexual assault at 800-656-HOPE or [www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org).
- National Domestic Violence Hotline offers support to survivors at 800-799-7233, text LOVEIS to 866-331-9474 or [www.thehotline.org](http://www.thehotline.org).
- Trans Lifeline is a trans-led organization that connects trans people to community, support, and resources to survive and thrive at 877-565-8860 or [translifeline.org](http://translifeline.org).
- The Trevor Project offers support to LGBTQ youth who are in crisis at 866-488-7386, text Start to 678-678, or [www.thetrevorproject.org](http://www.thetrevorproject.org).
- Lifeline offers crisis support to all at 800-273-8255 or [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org).

## Portland State University Resources

- PSU resource centers offer support to a wide range of students at [www.pdx.edu/student-life/resource-centers](http://www.pdx.edu/student-life/resource-centers)
- Students can contact PSU's Center for Student Health and Counseling (SHAC) at <https://www.pdx.edu/health-counseling/> and 503-725-2800.
- Employees can make an appointment with an Employee Assistance Counselor at <https://www.pdx.edu/human-resources/employee-assistance-program-eap> and 503-639-3009 or 800-433-2320.
- Resources for healing and coping for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) can be found on SHAC's website at [https://www.pdx.edu/health-counseling/sites/g/files/znlchr771/files/2020-06/CS\\_Healing%26Coping\\_v06.08.2020.pdf](https://www.pdx.edu/health-counseling/sites/g/files/znlchr771/files/2020-06/CS_Healing%26Coping_v06.08.2020.pdf)
- Resources for anyone experiencing homelessness, housing insecurity, and food insecurity are listed on our website at [pdx.edu/homelessness/find-help](http://pdx.edu/homelessness/find-help).

## Community Resources

- The Multnomah County Mental Health Call Center offers support at 503-988-4888.
- Find information on housing and emergency resources at <http://ahomeforeveryone.net/get-help>.
- For emergency assistance with basic needs, call 211 or 1-866-698-6155, text your zip code to 898211 (TXT211), email [help@211info.org](mailto:help@211info.org), or go to [www.211info.org](http://www.211info.org).

---

# *Executive Summary*

---

# Executive Summary

This report presents findings from Portland State University's first housing and food insecurity survey of students and employees. It was conducted by The Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative (HRAC), a center formed to help address homelessness and its negative impact on individuals, families, and communities, with an emphasis on communities of color. Reducing homelessness in the PSU community was one of the foundational goals of the center, and this survey is an important step in that work.

The survey was administered in the fall of 2019, and all students and employees enrolled or employed at PSU at that time were invited to participate. The survey was based on a growing body of research examining basic needs insecurity among college students (e.g., Baker-Smith et al., 2020; Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019). It is one of the first campus surveys in the country to also explore these factors among university employees.

This report examines the rates of housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity among students and employees disaggregated by race and additional factors to shed light on the most vulnerable members of our community. We also explored employment and financial situation, types of assistance received (e.g., SNAP benefits, Medicaid, food pantry use), health (e.g., sleep and stress), and social connectedness. Due to the unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and its widespread impacts, we also conducted a follow-up survey of 166 vulnerable students in order to understand how the pandemic impacted their basic needs security, academic performance, finances, and various aspects of their health and well-being.

## *The report examines the rates of:*



Housing Insecurity



Homelessness



Food Insecurity

## Key Findings

A total of 3,511 students (15% of all students) and 1,017 employees (28% of all employees) participated in the initial survey, and findings revealed the following:

### PSU Students

- **44.6%** experienced housing insecurity in the 12 months prior to completing the survey
- **16.1%** experienced homelessness in the 12 months prior to completing the survey
- **47%** experienced food insecurity in the 30 days prior to completing the survey
- **BIPOC** (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) students experienced high rates of basic needs insecurity. In particular, Native American students were almost twice as likely as White students to experience homelessness. They also had the highest rates of food insecurity (66.4%).

### PSU Employees

- **22.7%** experienced housing insecurity in the 12 months prior to completing the survey
- **5.6%** experienced homelessness in the 12 months prior to completing the survey
- **16.5%** experienced food insecurity in the 30 days prior to completing the survey
- **BIPOC** employees experienced high rates of basic needs insecurity. In particular, Black employees were more than twice as likely as White employees to experience housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity.

In addition to BIPOC students and employees, LGBTQ+ students and employees also reported high rates of housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity, as did students and employees with disabilities and medical conditions. Transfer students, first generation students, and current or former foster youth also reported high rates of basic needs insecurity.

Among employees, staff experienced higher rates of housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity than faculty or administrators. Non-tenure-track faculty had higher rates of basic needs insecurity than tenure-track faculty; and adjunct professors or instructors had higher rates of basic needs insecurity than full-time professors or instructors.

Among both students and employees, rates of financial stress, physical and mental health interference, insufficient sleep, and loneliness were higher among those who experienced housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity. Students and employees with basic needs insecurity also reported lower rates of monthly pay and higher rates of public assistance use.

## COVID-19 Findings

We conducted a follow-up survey of 166 students on their basic needs insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings should not be compared with the initial survey due to the substantial differences in the samples. Instead, these findings reveal how the pandemic impacted a small subset of participants:

- **64.5%** experienced housing insecurity during the pandemic
- **20.5%** experienced homelessness during the pandemic
- **55.4%** experienced food insecurity during the pandemic
- **BIPOC** students experienced higher rates of basic needs insecurity during the pandemic than White students

Additionally, we found that 32.5% of students surveyed had to leave their housing during the pandemic, with BIPOC students twice as likely as White students to have to leave housing. Over a third of the students we surveyed reported being laid off or fired from a job because of the pandemic. Of those who lost their jobs or had reduced hours, 90% experienced housing insecurity, homelessness, or food insecurity. Rates of social isolation and mental health concerns were high for the entire sample, but particularly among students who experienced basic needs insecurity during the pandemic.



Image Credits:  
Portland State University

## Conclusions and Next Steps

The findings from this report highlight the following:

- (1) The complexity of factors that may contribute to basic needs insecurity among university students and employees
- (2) The impact of basic needs insecurity on multiple life domains, including education, employment, physical and mental health, and community connection
- (3) The importance of PSU administrators working closely with student and employee groups to identify and implement solutions that effectively meet the needs of campus community members, especially those at higher risk of experiencing basic needs insecurity due to systemic and historical racism and discrimination. This work is all the more pressing given the economic, health, and social vulnerabilities that students and employees will face both during and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

---

# *Introduction*

---

# Introduction

## Defining Key Terminology

Before outlining the current state of knowledge regarding basic needs insecurity in higher education, it is first important to provide definitions for the primary categories of needs insecurity we examine in this report. We will return to these definitions and expand upon them to include descriptions of our measurement tools in later sections of the report.

*Housing insecurity* has been defined multiple ways by different government agencies and researchers, but generally it refers to a range of issues that compromise one's housing stability, including a lack of affordability, safety, quality, and consistency in housing.

Similarly, *homelessness* is defined in different ways depending on the federal agency and focal population involved. Traditional classifications rely on the definition from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which focuses on people living unsheltered, in emergency shelter, and in transitional housing. In line with other research on basic needs insecurity in higher education, we use an expanded definition of homelessness based on the one outlined by the U.S. Department of Education in the McKinney-Vento Act of 1987. This definition includes individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, including those living in "doubled up" situations with family or friends because of necessity, not by choice. This approach matches the local definition used by A Home For Everyone, the multi-jurisdictional governance structure within Multnomah County that addresses homelessness (Zapata et al., 2019).

Finally, *food insecurity* is defined as "a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food" (USDA, 2019). This occurs with either: (1) *low food security*, where households report reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet, but little to no indication of reduced food intake; or (2) *very low food security*, where households report multiple indicators of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake (USDA, 2019).

## Research on Basic Needs Insecurity Among College and University Students

Over the last decade, a large body of research has emerged that highlights the importance of studying and addressing basic needs insecurity among college students. Thanks to the pioneering efforts of Crutchfield and Maguire (e.g., 2017, 2018) in their work with the California State University System, and Goldrick-Rab and colleagues (e.g., 2018, 2019) with the Hope Center at Temple University, there is an expanding understanding and awareness of the critical role of housing and food security on the academic, occupational, social, and health outcomes of students. An exhaustive overview of this work is beyond the scope of this report, but below we briefly review some of the key research findings in this area.

### Housing Insecurity and Homelessness

A recent review of the extant research and nationally representative survey studies of college students found that nearly 10% of U.S. undergraduate students are experiencing homelessness or are self-supporting and at risk of homelessness (Broton, 2020). Further, this review found that 45% of college students experience some form of housing insecurity. This aligns with other national research on student housing insecurity and homelessness that suggests roughly 16% of students at four-year institutions have experienced homelessness in the last year and 35% have experienced housing insecurity in the last year (e.g., Baker-Smith et al., 2020). Research also suggests that graduate students experience homelessness and housing insecurity at similar rates as undergraduates (Baker-Smith et al., 2020; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019).

## Food Insecurity

As many as 33% of students at four-year institutions across the country experienced food insecurity, according to a national survey conducted by the Hope Center at 171 two-year institutions and 56 four-year institutions in 2019. Further, 36% of students from four-year institutions worried about running out of food, and 38% of students could not afford to eat balanced meals (Baker-Smith et al., 2020). Graduate students have been found to experience similar rates of food insecurity as undergraduates (Baker-Smith et al., 2020; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019).

The United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) also notes that having a low income (defined as being at or below 130% of the federal poverty line) is the most common risk factor for food insecurity among college students, and roughly 39% of undergraduate students in 2016 were considered low income (US Government Accountability Office, 2018). Further, the majority of low-income students also experience at least one additional risk factor for food insecurity, such as being a single parent or having a disability (US Government Accountability Office, 2018).

## Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurity

Across the body of research on basic needs insecurity, it is clear that some students are at a greater risk of housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity than others. In particular, there are racial and ethnic disparities, with Black and Indigenous students experiencing the highest rates of housing and food insecurity—particularly in comparison with their White peers (e.g., Baker-Smith et al., 2020; Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018). Students who are transgender have higher rates of homelessness and housing insecurity compared to students who do not identify as transgender; and gay, lesbian, or bisexual students have higher rates of homelessness and housing insecurity than their heterosexual peers (e.g., Baker-Smith et al., 2020).

In addition, former foster youth, students formerly convicted of a crime, parenting students, and students with disabilities are also at a greater risk of ba-

sic needs insecurity (Baker-Smith et al., 2020). And, of course, intersectionality matters: research suggests that students with a greater number of overlapping marginalized identities (e.g., race, gender identity, and sexual orientation) have higher likelihoods of food and housing insecurity, regardless of whether each individual factor is a predictor of basic needs insecurity on its own (Haskett, Kotter-Grühn, & Majumder, 2020).

## Research on Basic Needs Insecurity Among College and University Employees

Research on basic needs insecurity among college employees is scarce, but a recent survey of contingent and adjunct faculty at both two-year and four-year institutions found that nearly a quarter relied on public assistance, and 40% had difficulty covering basic household expenses (American Federation of Teachers, 2020). Almost one-third of respondents earned \$25,000 or less a year, placing them below the federal poverty threshold for a family of four. Further, only 16% of adjunct professors surveyed reported being able to cover their core monthly expenses (American Federation of Teachers, 2020).

To our knowledge, our report is the first comprehensive study of housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity to include both students and employees.

---

# *Methodology*

---

# Methodology

## Research Method

The Office of Institutional Research and Planning at Portland State University provided the email addresses of all 23,362 students and 3,590 employees enrolled or employed at PSU at the time of the survey (Fall 2019). In cases where individuals were both students and employees, they were included with the sample that represented their primary role. For example, a full-time PSU employee taking evening classes part-time was included with the employee sample instead of the student sample. Due to informed consent requirements, students under the age of 18 were not able to be included in the study.

An email invitation to participate in the study was sent to students and employees beginning the second week of the fall term, with reminders sent at the same time each week for the following three weeks. Interested participants clicked the link provided in the email, which sent them to a Qualtrics survey with a full explanation of the study and informed consent information. After completing the survey, participants had the option to enter a drawing for a \$100 Visa gift card (20 gift cards were awarded to students, 10 to employees). Participants also had the option to provide their contact information for follow-up interviews or focus groups about their experiences with housing and food insecurity. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were unable to complete this part of our planned research, and we decided instead to conduct an online survey of students' experiences with basic needs insecurity during the pandemic. Please refer to the COVID-19 section of this report to learn more about the methodology, sample, and results of this follow-up survey.

## Measure

Our survey was primarily based on procedures and instruments recommended or developed by (1) Crutchfield and Maguire (2017) in their work with the California State University System; and (2) Goldrick-Rab and colleagues (2018) in their national research with

the Hope Center at Temple University. We also consulted with other colleges and universities conducting similar research (e.g., Haskett and colleagues, 2018; Wilking, Roll, & Kornbluh, 2020) when developing our survey and methodology. In addition to asking about student and employee experiences with housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity, we also asked questions about their employment and financial situation, types of assistance received (e.g., SNAP benefits, Medicaid, food pantry use), health (e.g., sleep and stress), and social connectedness. Because our study was one of the first to assess basic needs insecurity among employees in addition to students, we adapted student questions and created new questions to fit the unique context of employees' experiences. After creating the survey, we pilot tested it among both students and employees and made modifications based on their suggestions.

## Response Rates

Because the focus of our report was on housing insecurity and homelessness, participants had to complete at least the housing and homelessness questions of the survey to be included in the study. A total of 3,511 students (15% of the 23,262 students invited to take the survey) completed at least the housing and homelessness questions, while 3,272 (14%) completed the entire survey. This response rate is higher than those reported by the Hope Center in their national surveys, which are typically in the range of 8 to 10% (e.g., Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019), and is close to the 12.8% figure reported by the Hope Center in their 2020 report of Oregon Community Colleges.

A total of 1,017 employees (28.3% of the 3,590 employees invited to take the survey) completed at least the housing and homelessness questions, and 964 (26.9%) completed the entire survey.

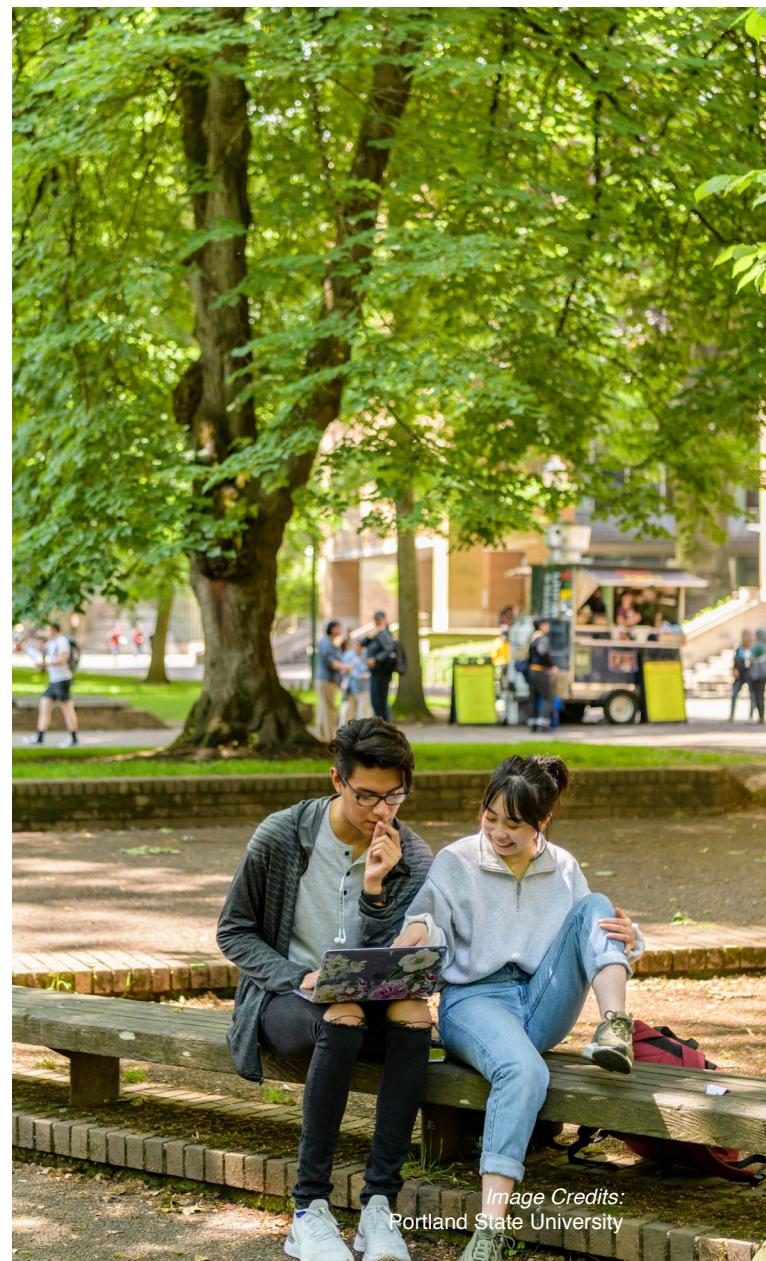
The number of students or employees who responded to each question is noted throughout the tables and figures in the results section of the report.

## Sample and Comparisons to the University

The student and employee samples were generally representative of the PSU campus community at the time of the survey (see Appendix A and B for full sample descriptions and select comparisons with PSU population). Percentages of racial and ethnic groups were similar to campus totals, although White participants were overrepresented in both the student and employee samples; and Asian or Asian American and Native American participants were represented slightly higher in the student sample. Relative to the broader campus community, the percentage of men in our study was much lower in both the student sample (26.8% compared to 44.1% among all students) and the employee sample (31.7% compared to 41.6% among all employees). This is in line with previous research indicating that men often have lower response rates on surveys (Sax, Gilmartin, & Bryant, 2003).

Our student sample had a slightly higher percentage of graduate students and full-time students compared to their percentages in the full PSU student population. The employee sample had a higher percentage of staff and administrators compared to campus totals. This is likely due to the fact that respondents could select more than one employment category in our survey, whereas the university rates reflected only their primary role. For example, in our survey, employees could identify as both faculty and administrators, while in the university rates they would be identified as either faculty or administrator, but not both.

Given our high response rates and similar demographic data pertaining to student and employee characteristics when compared to the university, we feel confident that the results presented in the next section are generally representative of the broader Portland State community. However, it is also important to recognize that our campus community is dynamic and diverse, and the perspectives of many of its most vulnerable members may not be adequately reflected in our findings. We recommend ongoing research using a range of methodologies and outreach approaches.



*Image Credits:*  
Portland State University

---

# *Results*

---

*Students*

# Student Results

## Prevalence of Basic Needs Insecurity Among Students

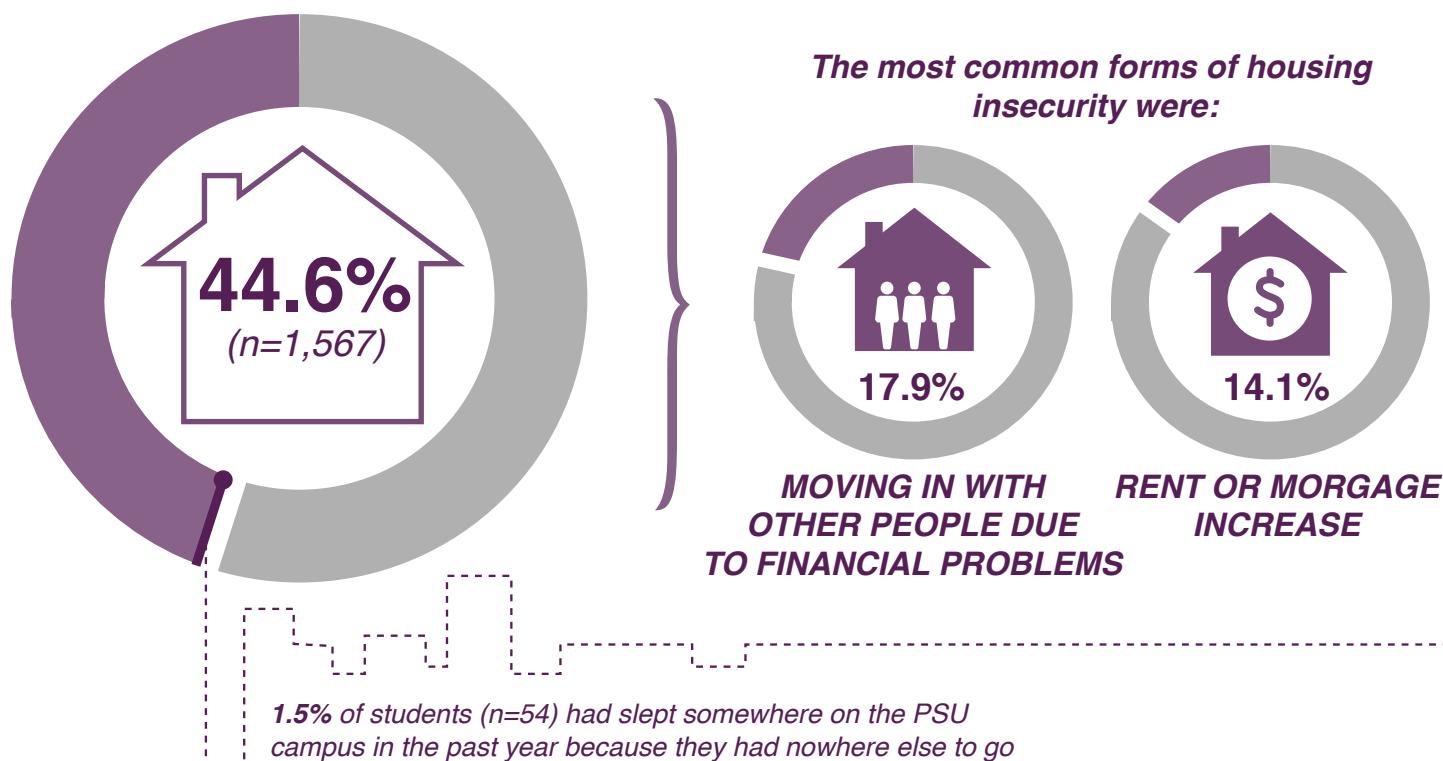
### Student Housing Insecurity

Housing insecurity includes a range of housing issues, including a lack of affordability, safety, quality, and consistency in housing. Housing insecurity among PSU students was assessed using a nine-item set of questions developed by the Hope Center asking about students' ability to pay rent and utilities, frequency of moving, and leaving housing because they feel unsafe (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019). We also included three items from previous studies of campus basic needs insecurity (e.g., California State University, NC State University) asking about evictions and being forced to leave housing. All questions asked about students' experiences in the 12 months prior to completing the survey in Fall 2019 (see Table 1).

In our student sample, 44.6% of respondents ( $n = 1,567$ ) reported experiencing at least one form of housing insecurity in the past 12 months (see Figure 1). Moving in with other people because of financial problems was the most commonly reported form of housing insecurity.

We also asked about a range of other experiences pertaining to housing vulnerability. Approximately 16% of students reported living in a home that is owned by a local housing authority or public agency, and 2.4% reported receiving a public housing voucher (e.g., Section 8) to subsidize the cost of their housing. When asked how safe they feel where they currently live, 27.1% of students indicated feeling only somewhat safe, 5.2% indicated feeling a little bit safe, and 1.7% indicated feeling not at all safe. Finally, 1.5% of students ( $n = 54$ ) indicated that they slept somewhere on the PSU campus in the past year because they had nowhere else to go.

**FIGURE 1.** Students Who Experienced at Least One Form of Housing Insecurity in the Past 12 Months



**TABLE 1.** Housing Insecurity Among Students Over the Past 12 Months

Housing Insecurity Indicators	Percentage Experiencing
Experienced at least one form of housing insecurity	44.6%
Moved in with another person because of financial problems	17.9%
Experienced a rent or mortgage increase that made it difficult to pay	14.1%
Did not pay the full amount of a gas, oil, water, or electricity bill	13.8%
Had an account default or go into collections	10.7%
Did not pay or underpaid your rent or mortgage	10.1%
Lived with others beyond the expected capacity of the house or apartment	7.1%
Left the place you were staying at because you felt unsafe	6.8%
Joined someone else's housing without telling the landlord	6.5%
Moved three or more times	5.4%
Got thrown out of the place you were staying at by someone else in the household	2.8%
Got evicted from your home	1.5%
Received a summons to appear in housing court	0.5%

*n* = 3,511

“

*My housing costs are more than 1/3 of my income and are likely not long term. It has been very challenging to find secure long term housing.*

- PSU student, 2019

## Student Homelessness

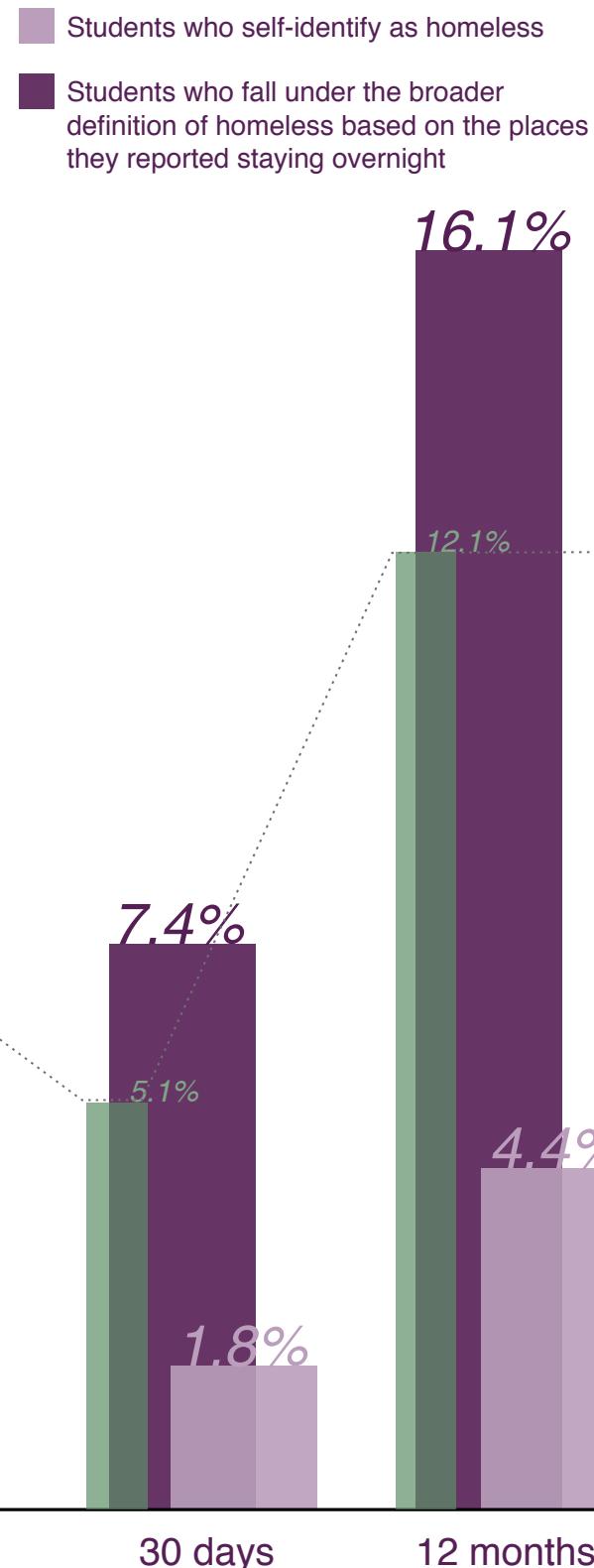
Homelessness refers to not having a fixed, regular, or adequate place to live. To assess homelessness among PSU students, we first asked about lifetime experiences with homelessness. Nineteen percent of students ( $n = 667$ ) reported that they had experienced homelessness at some point in their life, with 45.9% of those ( $n = 306$ ) indicating that they experienced homelessness before age 18.

Following the approach used by the Hope Center and other campus basic needs surveys, we then asked students to self-identify as experiencing homelessness in the past 30 days and past 12 months. In total, 1.8% of students ( $n = 62$ ) self-identified as homeless in the past 30 days and 4.4% ( $n = 156$ ) self-identified as homeless in the past 12 months. However, as Table 2 illustrates, when we asked students about the places they have stayed in the past 30 days and past 12 months using a measure of homelessness based on definitions from both the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Department of Education (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2017), the numbers increased dramatically.

Specifically, 7.4% of students in our sample ( $n = 259$ ) indicated experiencing some form of homelessness in the past 30 days, while 16.1% of students ( $n = 567$ ) experienced some form of homelessness in the past 12 months (see Figure 2).

The most commonly experienced form of homelessness was temporarily staying with a relative or friend, which is also referred to as doubled-up or “couch surfing.” It is important to use this expanded, more inclusive definition of homelessness because many students may not consider themselves homeless if they are not sleeping outside or in a shelter. A more restrictive definition of homelessness may discourage students living in doubled-up situations from seeking out resources and receiving the support they need to become more stably housed.

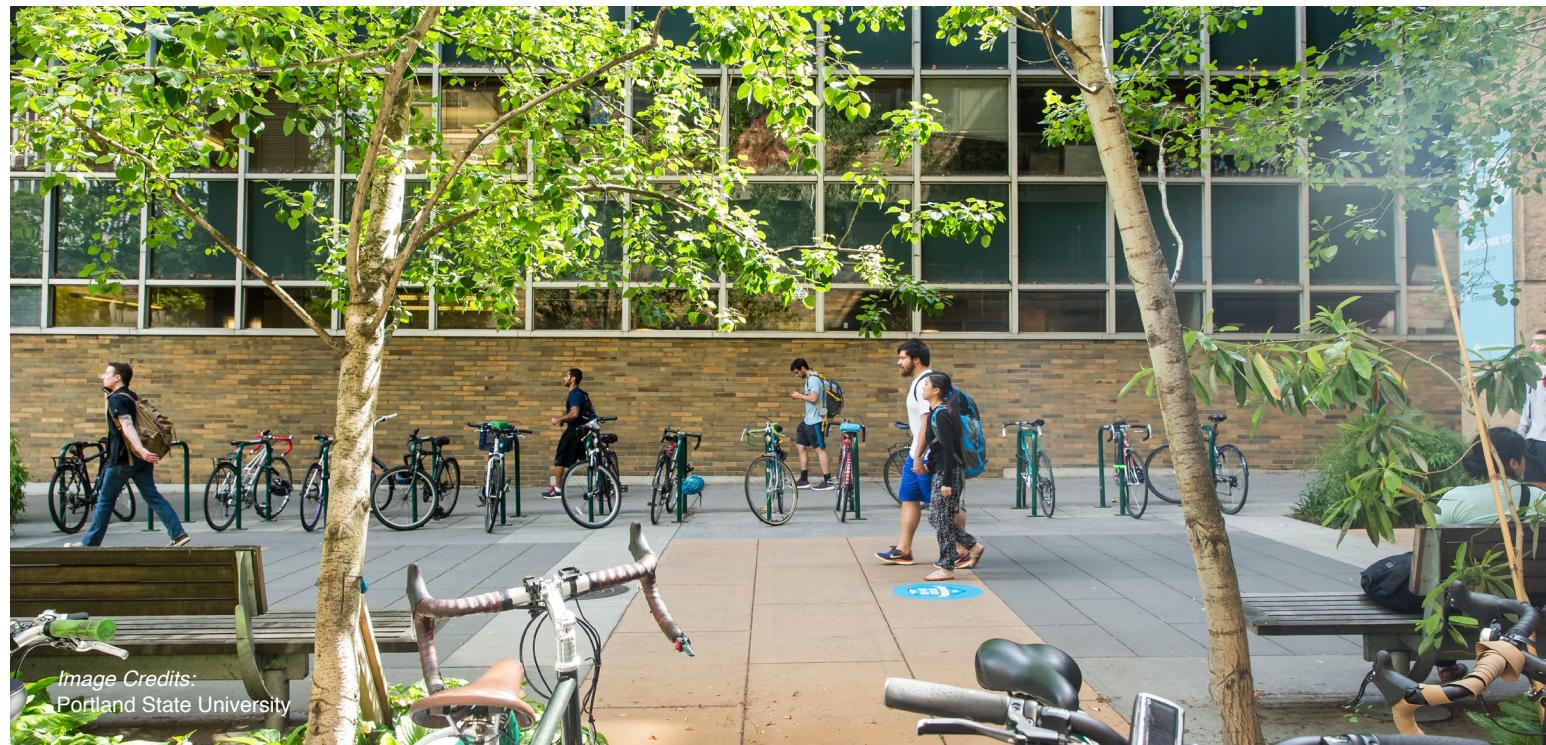
**FIGURE 2. Students Who Experienced Homelessness in the Past 30 Days or 12 Months**



**TABLE 2.** Homelessness Among Students in the Past 30 Days and 12 Months

<b>Locations stayed overnight (Students were asked to select all that apply):</b>	<b>Past 30 days</b>	<b>Past 12 months</b>
Stayed at any of the following locations	7.4%	16.1%
Temporarily staying with a relative, friend, or couch surfing until I find other housing	5.1%	12.1%
In a closed area/space with a roof not meant for human habituation such as an abandoned building, car or truck, van, RV, camper, encampment or tent, or unconverted garage, attic, or basement	1.7%	4.1%
Temporarily at a hotel or motel without a permanent home to return to (not on vacation or business travel)	0.8%	2.7%
An outdoor location such as street, sidewalk, or alley, bus or train stop, campground or woods, park, bench, or riverbed, under bridge or overpass	1.1%	2.5%
At a shelter	0.4%	1.2%
In transitional housing or independent living program	0.3%	0.9%
At a group home such as a halfway house or residential program for mental health or substance abuse	0.2%	0.7%
At a treatment center (such as detox, hospital, etc.)	0.1%	0.4%

*n* = 3,511



## Student Food Insecurity

Food insecurity refers to an individual's or household's inability to access adequate food due to limited money or other resources. We used the U.S. Department of Agriculture's 18-item measure to assess rates of food insecurity in the past 30 days (USDA, 2012). The measure includes 10 items assessing a variety of food situations (see Table 3), with eight additional items asked only to students with children in their households.

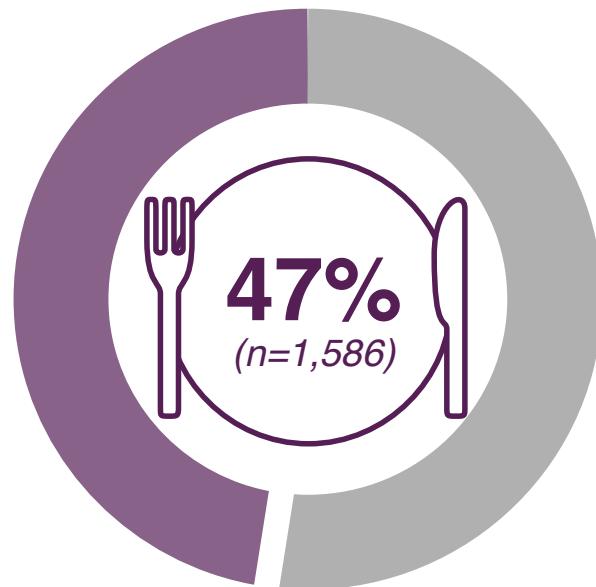
In total, 47% of students ( $n = 1,586$ ) experienced food insecurity in the 30 days prior to completing the survey (see Figure 3), with 17.3% at the low level of food security and 29.7% at the very low level of food security according to the number of food insecurity statements that applied to them.

Over half of all students reported not being able to afford to eat balanced meals. Further, 41.8% of students reported cutting the size of their meals because they did not have enough money for food; and, on average, this occurred on almost 10 of the past 30 days. Almost 9% of students indicated that they did not eat for a whole day because there was not enough money for food. On average, this occurred on approximately 6 of the past 30 days.

Of the 464 students who indicated living in households with children under age 18 present, 37.7% ( $n = 175$ ) reported having to rely on only a few kinds of low-cost food to feed children in their household because they were running out of money to buy food. Almost 30% ( $n = 133$ ) reported not being able to feed children in their household a balanced meal because they could not afford to.

Students were also asked about their knowledge and use of the PSU Food Pantry and PSU Free Food Market: 23.8% of students ( $n = 803$ ) had utilized the PSU Food Pantry, while 18.9% did not know that PSU has a food pantry; similarly, 17.0% of students ( $n = 574$ ) had utilized the PSU Free Food Market, while 23.7% of students did not know there was a free food market at PSU.

Finally, students were asked whether they purchased a PSU meal plan, which kind they purchased, and whether this meal plan was sufficient for their food needs. A total of 227 students (6.8%) reported purchasing a meal plan, with the majority of these (60.2%) being of a combination of meals and dining dollars. One quarter of students who purchased a meal plan ( $n = 56$ ) reported that it was not sufficient to meet their food needs.



**FIGURE 3. Students Who Experienced Food Insecurity in the Past 30 days**

**TABLE 3.** Food Insecurity Among Students in the Past 30 Days

Food Insecurity Statements	Percentage Experiencing
I couldn't afford to eat balanced meals.	54.6%
I worried whether my food would run out before I got money to buy more.	46.1%
I cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food.	41.8%
I ate less than I felt I should because there wasn't enough money for food.	36.8%
The food that I bought just didn't last and I didn't have enough money to get more.	36.4%
I cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food (3 or more times in the last 30 days).	33.3%
I was hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food.	32.0%
I lost weight because there wasn't enough money for food.	14.4%
I did not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food.	8.7%
I did not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food (3 or more times in the last 30 days).	6.7%

*n* = 3,374

*I almost exclusively use the PSU food pantry for food needs. The majority of my money goes towards utilities and a small studio apartment that is close enough to my job and to campus.*

- PSU student, 2019

“

*Meal options for graduate students on campus are not sufficient or affordable. We are stuck in a limbo where we do not qualify for student benefits or faculty benefits, but still pay out of pocket for all the student fees.*

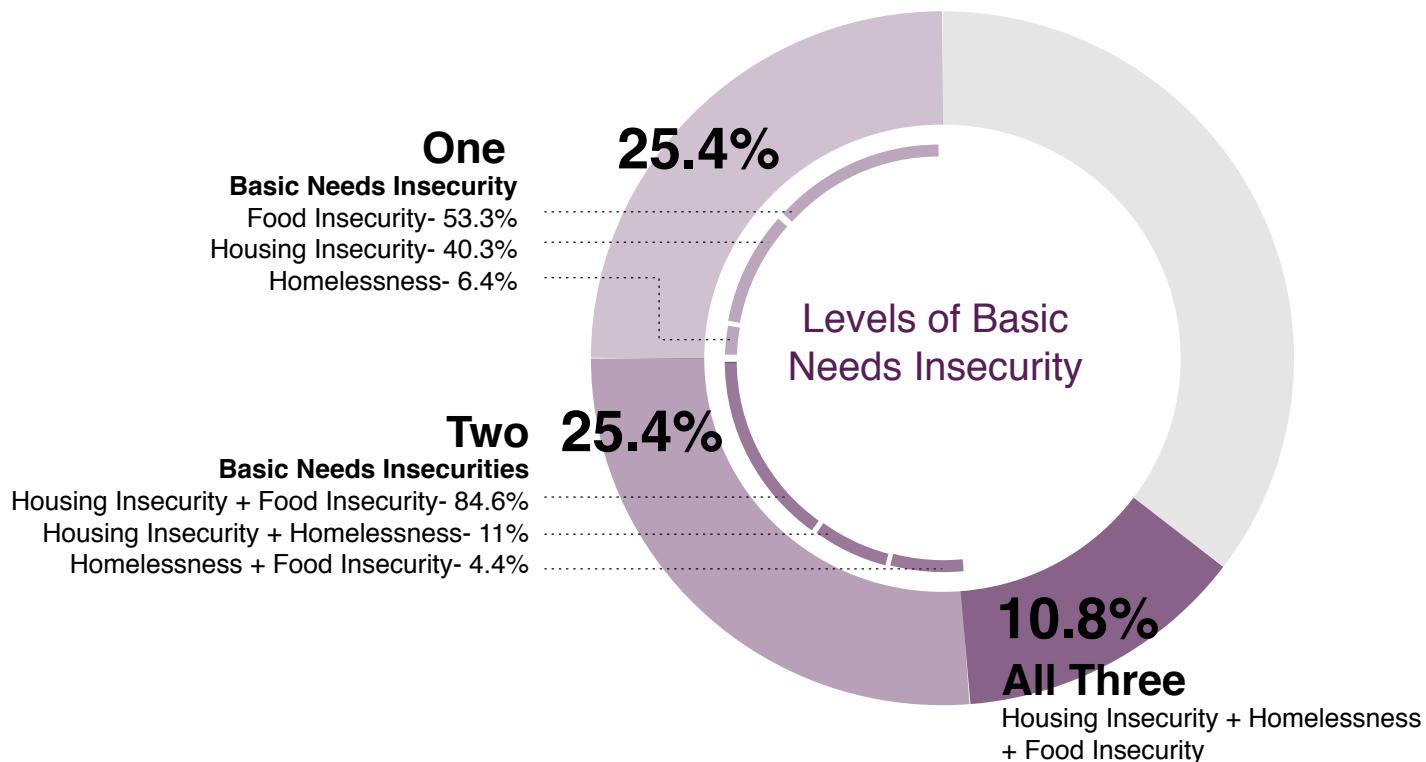
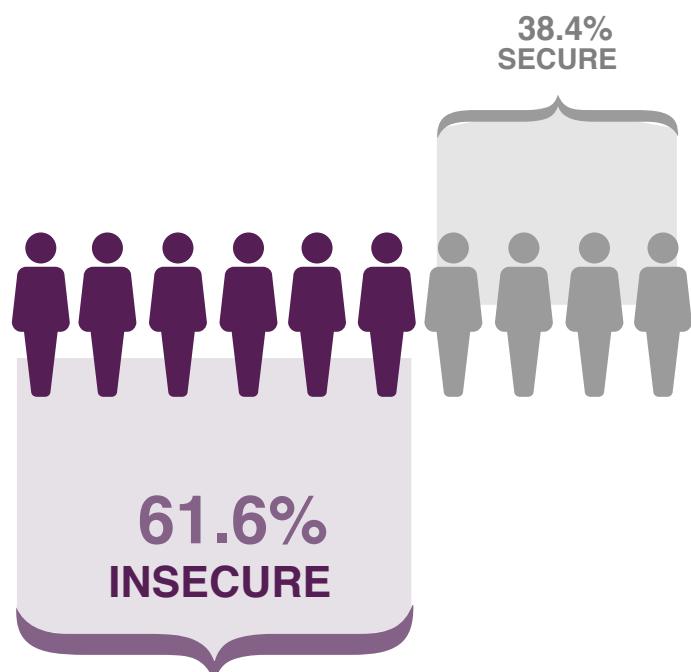
- PSU student, 2019

## Intersections of Housing Insecurity, Homelessness, and Food Insecurity

Basic needs insecurities often overlap, with some students experiencing both housing and food insecurity, or a mix of housing insecurity and homelessness (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019). Basic needs insecurity can also vary over time, with students experiencing food insecurity during one academic quarter and housing insecurity the next. Secure students were those with no basic needs insecurities. Students who were categorized as insecure were those with at least one vulnerability in their basic needs, meaning they experienced housing insecurity, homelessness, and/or food insecurity in the past year. Finally, some students faced challenges with all of their basic needs, meaning they experienced housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity in the past year.

Figure 4 displays the overlapping challenges students face when trying to meet their basic needs, with 61.6% of PSU students experiencing some form of basic needs insecurity. Only 38.4% of students at PSU were food and housing secure in the past year.

**FIGURE 4.** Intersections of Housing Insecurity, Homelessness, and Food Insecurity Among PSU Students



## Student Stories

### Homelessness as a child

At 11 years old she didn't know the word for gentrification. All she knew was that people were moving into her neighborhood and that's why her family couldn't afford to stay.

Then her father lost his job during the Great Recession, and the family moved into her grandmother's house. Two families, seven people and four dogs, crowded into three bedrooms. Her sister lived with another relative.

At the time, she didn't consider herself homeless. It's not the picture that people usually have.

"When we hear homelessness, we think of eating at a soup kitchen, living in a shelter, or begging at freeway entrances. While those are prominent issues, it's not just those things," she said. "Those hidden issues go so much deeper."

She lost two years of her education as they moved from one grandmother's house to the other's, finally settling down in a place of their own in Rogue River, Oregon. She worked hard to find acceptance in a town where she was one of the few people with brown skin.

She found her own community and managed to graduate on time. Now she's a graduate student at Portland State University working toward her teaching degree. She wants to work with low-income students because she knows what it's like to struggle for access.

- Graduate student
- Student of color
- First-generation college student
- Experienced homelessness for two years

She is the first in her extended family to graduate from college. Still, it all feels so precarious whenever she gets a letter from financial aid about possible interruptions in support.

"One of my all time biggest fears is being back in that place," she said. "Whenever something goes wrong, it's the first place my mind goes to: I'm not going to have a place again."

She also worries about the possibility of falling short of her graduate degree and what that would mean for her family.

"I feel responsible for lifting my family out of poverty. We're one paycheck away from losing everything," she said.

"If I don't succeed, I'm not only failing myself, I'm failing my entire family that has spent their lives trying to get me to a place of success."

The 23 year old is now teaching high school English and is slated to graduate with her master's in education this June.

***I feel responsible for lifting my family out of poverty.  
We're one paycheck away from losing everything.***



#### Crisis Support

This report covers a difficult topic and many of the personal stories include traumatic experiences including assault and identity-based violence. If you have experienced similar events or are currently struggling with these experiences, know that help is available.

- Lifeline offers crisis support to all at 800-273-8255 or [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org).

**Notes:** Student stories come from personal interviews with students who volunteered to share their experiences. Names have been omitted to protect their privacy.

# Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurity

Homelessness disproportionately affects communities of color, particularly Black and Indigenous people, as well as LGBTQ+ individuals and people with disabilities. Similarly, research conducted by the Hope Center, the California State University system, and others has consistently shown that some students are at a higher risk of basic needs insecurity than others. In this section, we report disparities in rates of housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity by student demographics, disabilities or medical conditions, and life experiences. From this point forward, student rates of housing insecurity and homelessness refer to their experiences in the 12 months prior to completing the survey, and food insecurity to the past 30 days.

## Race and Ethnicity

As Table 4 demonstrates, students from historically marginalized racial or ethnic groups (e.g., Black or African American, Native American) experienced the highest rates of housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity. Students who identify as multiracial had the highest rates of housing insecurity, while Native American students reported the highest rates of homelessness and food insecurity. White and Asian or Asian American students reported the lowest rates of basic needs insecurities, which is in line with previous research (e.g., Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019).

**TABLE 4.** Disparities in Student Basic Needs Insecurity by Race and Ethnicity

Race or Ethnicity	Number of Students	Housing Insecurity	Homelessness	Food Insecurity
Asian or Asian American	412	35.9%	14.6%	44.0%
Black or African American	140	52.1%	25.0%	55.7%
Hispanic or Latino/a/x	468	48.3%	19.2%	57.2%
Middle Eastern or North African	54	48.1%	27.8%	50.0%
Multiracial	180	60.0%	28.9%	60.6%
Native American	107	58.9%	29.0%	66.4%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	63	54.0%	22.2%	57.1%
White	2,279	45.1%	15.7%	42.8%

**Notes:** Race and ethnicity classifications in the table above are not mutually exclusive. Students were asked to select all that apply to them from the list above, and rates of basic needs insecurities are reported according to their self-identifications. This approach can sometimes mask disparities that exist between groups, so we also calculated rates of needs insecurities for students who identified only as White and not any other race or ethnicity. When examined in this manner, rates of housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity decreased by around one percentage point for White students. The Number of Students column indicates the number of survey respondents to our housing insecurity and homelessness measures. The number of survey respondents for the food insecurity measure may vary slightly but not substantially.

## Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

Students whose gender identity and/or sexual orientation fall into historically marginalized groups (e.g., transgender students, queer students) also experienced higher rates of housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity compared to students whose identities have been historically privileged (e.g., students who are men, heterosexual students) (see Table 5). Transgender, non-binary, genderqueer, two-spirit, and agender students experienced disproportionately high rates of housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity as compared to their peers who identified as women, men, or questioning/unsure. Similarly, students who identified as pansexual, queer, bisexual, lesbian, gay, or asexual experienced higher rates of basic needs insecurity than their heterosexual peers.

**TABLE 5. Disparities in Student Basic Needs Insecurity by Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation**

	Number of Students	Housing Insecurity	Homelessness	Food Insecurity
<b>Gender Identity</b>				
Woman	2,074	44.9%	14.6%	46.4%
Man	884	40.0%	16.5%	41.3%
Transgender (includes respondents who selected Transgender, Trans Man, or Trans Woman)	60	56.7%	23.3%	63.3%
Non-binary, Genderqueer, or Two-Spirit	176	63.1%	24.4%	62.5%
Agender	15	53.3%	33.3%	66.7%
Questioning or unsure	25	48.0%	16.0%	36.0%
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>				
Asexual	128	52.3%	25.0%	50.8%
Bisexual	475	54.7%	18.9%	55.6%
Gay, Lesbian, or Same Gender Loving	177	50.3%	18.6%	46.6%
Heterosexual	1,902	39.1%	13.0%	39.9%
Pansexual	142	62.7%	28.9%	62.7%
Queer	191	59.2%	21.5%	63.4%
Questioning or unsure	93	41.9%	16.1%	41.9%

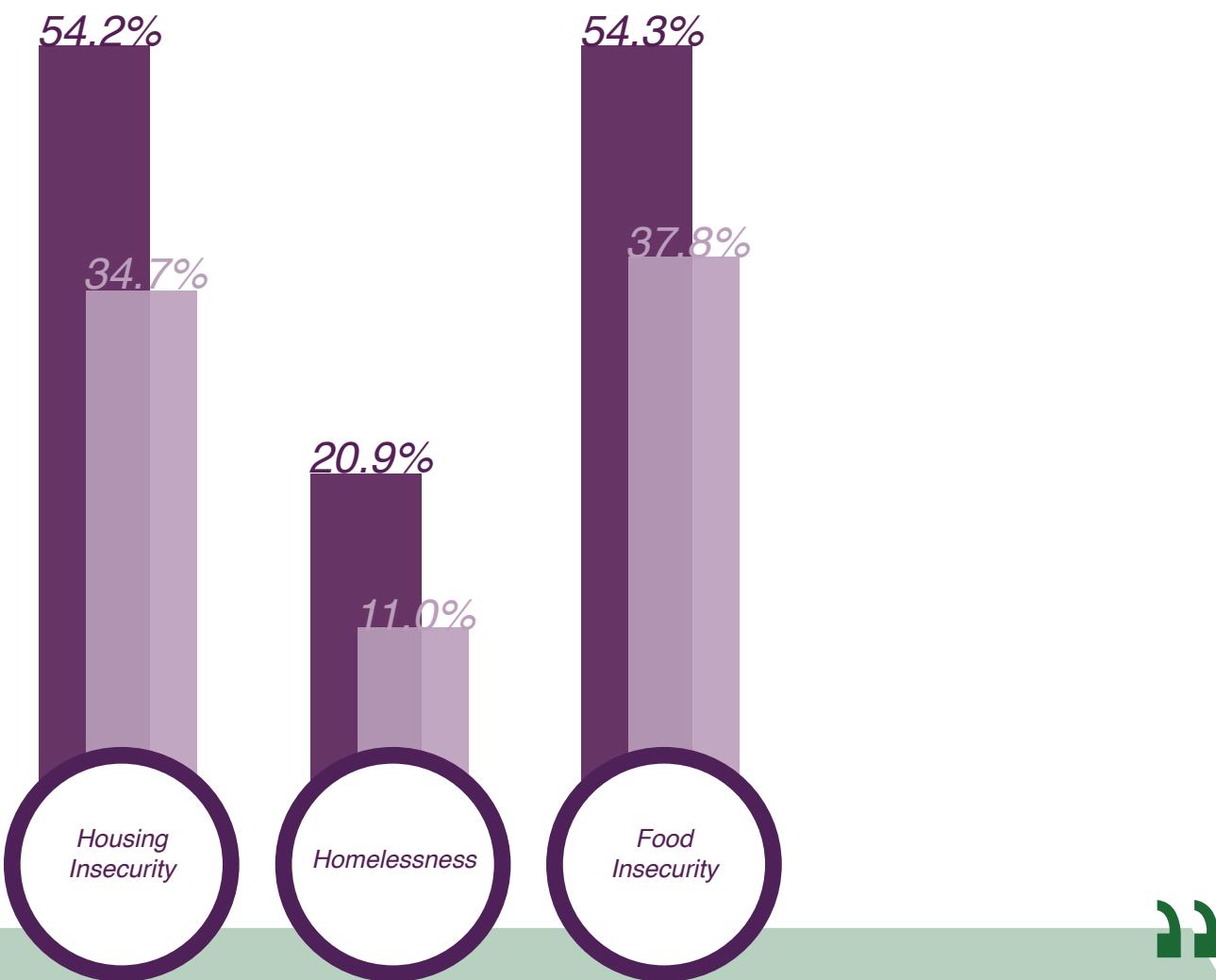
**Notes:** Some gender and sexual orientation categories were combined due to a small number of respondents in some categories and our efforts to maintain confidentiality. The Number of Students column indicates the number of survey respondents to our housing insecurity and homelessness measures. The number of survey respondents for the food insecurity measure may vary slightly but not substantially. Please exercise caution in drawing conclusions from percentages corresponding to categories with a small number of respondents.

## Disability or Medical Condition

Students with disabilities or major medical conditions reported much higher rates of housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity compared to students without disabling conditions (see Figure 5 and Table 6). This was true for each disability or medical condition examined in this study, particularly physical disabilities and learning disabilities.

**FIGURE 5. Disparities in Student Basic Needs Insecurity by Disability or Medical Condition**

- Students with at least one disability or medical condition reported
- Students with no disability or medical condition reported



*I often have to skip meals due to my schedule and often don't get the nutritional value I need medically because I either can't afford it and/or don't have time [or resources] to make [food]... on campus.*

- PSU student, 2019

**TABLE 6.** Disparities in Student Basic Needs Insecurity by Disability or Medical Condition

	Number of Students	Housing Insecurity	Homelessness	Food Insecurity
<b>At least one disability or medical condition reported</b>				
Yes	1,764	54.2%	20.9%	54.3%
No	1,541	34.7%	11.0%	37.8%
<b>Learning Disability</b>				
Yes	197	63.5%	25.4%	61.4%
No	3,108	44.0%	15.7%	45.7%
<b>Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)</b>				
Yes	449	61.2%	22.9%	57.2%
No	2,856	42.6%	15.3%	44.9%
<b>Autism Spectrum Disorder</b>				
Yes	64	50.0%	21.9%	53.1%
No	3,241	45.0%	16.2%	46.5%
<b>Physical Disability</b>				
Yes	206	61.7%	30.1%	66.0%
No	3,099	44.0%	15.4%	45.3%
<b>Chronic Illness</b>				
Yes	345	58.8%	23.5%	58.3%
No	2,960	43.5%	15.5%	45.2%
<b>Mental Health / Psychological Disability</b>				
Yes	1,431	55.6%	21.5%	55.3%
No	1,874	37.1%	12.4%	40.0%

**Notes:** The Number of Students column indicates the number of survey respondents to our housing insecurity and homelessness measures. The number of survey respondents for the food insecurity measure may vary slightly but not substantially.



*Image Credits:*  
Portland State University

## **Additional Demographic Variables**

In general, younger students reported the lowest levels of basic needs insecurity, while students between the ages of 26 and 30 experienced the highest rates of basic needs insecurity (see Table 7). In line with previous research (e.g., Goldrick-Rab, 2019), as the education level of students' parents increased, their rates of basic needs insecurity decreased. Further, students who were married or in a domestic partnership reported lower rates of basic needs insecurity than their single or dating peers, while those who were divorced or separated reported the highest rates of basic needs insecurity.

**TABLE 7.** Disparities in Student Basic Needs Insecurity by Additional Demographic Variables

	Number of Students	Housing Insecurity	Homelessness	Food Insecurity
<b>Age</b>				
18 to 20	778	31.4%	15.6%	43.2%
21 to 25	1,040	46.4%	15.9%	50.9%
26 to 30	688	54.4%	20.1%	50.7%
30 and above	779	49.0%	14.2%	40.1%
<b>Highest level of education completed by either of your parents and/or guardians</b>				
No high school diploma	250	49.6%	16.4%	57.4%
High school diploma / GED	561	54.7%	21.0%	59.2%
Some college (but not college degree)	668	50.6%	17.7%	52.7%
Associate's degree	271	47.2%	17.0%	48.1%
Bachelor's degree	818	38.6%	13.0%	40.6%
Graduate degree	717	37.0%	14.4%	32.8%
<b>Relationship Status</b>				
Single	1,395	43.2%	18.9%	47.9%
In a relationship(s)	1,243	49.1%	16.0%	52.1%
Married or domestic partnership	544	35.5%	8.1%	29.1%
Divorced	62	72.6%	27.4%	54.8%
Separated	20	75.0%	35.0%	80.0%
Widowed	*	*	*	*

\*Categories with fewer than 10 respondents were excluded to maintain confidentiality, which is a more conservative approach than the Department of Education's policy of excluding cell sizes of fewer than 6..

**Notes:** The Number of Students column indicates the number of survey respondents to our housing insecurity and homelessness measures. The number of survey respondents for the food insecurity measure may vary slightly but not substantially. Please exercise caution in drawing conclusions from percentages corresponding to categories with a small number of respondents.

## Student Life Experiences

We asked students about a variety of life circumstances and experiences that may put them at a higher risk of facing basic needs insecurity. Transfer students, first generation students, current or former foster youth, veterans, and DACA students all reported higher levels of housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity compared to students without such experiences (see Table 8). These disparities were particularly striking among current and former foster youth, whose rates of housing insecurity and homelessness were double those of other students; and whose rates of food insecurity were more than triple the rates of their peers. Parenting students had higher rates of housing insecurity as students without children under the age of 18 but similar rates of homelessness and food insecurity.

**TABLE 8. Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurity by Student Life Experiences**

	Number of Students	Housing Insecurity	Homelessness	Food Insecurity
<b>Transfer Student</b>				
Yes	1,543	54.2%	18.9%	51.6%
No	1,762	37.1%	14.1%	42.2%
<b>First Generation College Student</b>				
Yes	1,116	53.4%	17.9%	56.7%
No	2,189	40.8%	15.5%	41.4%
<b>Current or Former Foster Youth</b>				
Yes	81	64.2%	32.1%	77.8%
No	3,224	44.6%	15.9%	45.8%
<b>International Student</b>				
Yes	125	36.8%	16.0%	37.6%
No	3,180	45.4%	16.3%	46.9%
<b>Out-of-State Student</b>				
Yes	532	47.4%	20.3%	47.9%
No	2,773	44.6%	15.5%	46.3%

(Continuation from previous page)

	Number of Students	Housing Insecurity	Homelessness	Food Insecurity
<b>ESL (English as a Second Language)</b>				
Yes	115	43.5%	18.3%	50.4%
No	3,190	54.9%	16.2%	46.5%
<b>Veteran</b>				
Yes	132	56.1%	28.0%	44.7%
No	3,173	44.6%	15.8%	46.7%
<b>Immigrant to the U.S.</b>				
Yes	3,155	41.3%	17.3%	42.7%
No	150	45.3%	16.3%	46.8%
<b>DACA student</b>				
Yes	29	55.2%	20.7%	69.0%
No	3,276	45.0%	16.3%	46.4%
<b>Student Athlete</b>				
Yes	41	34.1%	14.6%	46.3%
No	3,264	45.2%	16.3%	46.6%
<b>Parent of a child under 18 who lives with you</b>				
Yes	295	54.6%	12.5%	44.1%
No	3,010	44.2%	16.7%	46.8%

**Notes:** The Number of Students column indicates the number of survey respondents to our housing insecurity and homelessness measures. The number of survey respondents for the food insecurity measure may vary slightly but not substantially. Please exercise caution in drawing conclusions from percentages corresponding to categories with a small number of respondents.

## Student Stories

### Search for safety

He finished his senior year in high school at a homeless shelter.

Home was no longer safe. One of his parents threatened to hurt him after he came out as transgender.

The experience feels normal, he said. It's the only thing he knows, and there were so many others at the shelter with the same story. Half of them identified as transgender.

"It made me sad to see how many people like me were there," he said.

The shelter was chaotic, loud, and relied on staff who had little training or education in social work. Some even pressed transgender youth about "why do you have to be trans?"

He witnessed one staff member flip a youth over and throw him to the floor.

"I remember thinking that this place is not safe either," he said.

As bad as it is, trans youth face better treatment in the youth shelter than the adult one, he said. The youth shelter has cameras and is more open to placing youth with the gender they feel most comfortable with.



***I remember thinking that  
this place is not safe either.***

- Undergraduate student
- Student of color
- Identifies as transgender
- Experienced homelessness for two years

He lived there for two years before moving into the dorms at Portland State University. He was thankful that PSU allowed students to move in early. He thought he would never have to go back to the shelter.

"The dorms are the best place I have ever lived," he said. "Everything is perfect...I have everything I could wish for."

Then COVID hit.

Students were encouraged to find alternative housing. To save money, he moved back home. It's still not a safe place. He has spent a few nights at the shelter as well to escape violence.

He is counting the days to September 24 when he returns to campus.

The undergraduate student is majoring in sociology with a minor in psychology. He wants to use his education and training to work as a social worker at a shelter or to do community research. He knows the need for reform firsthand. There are so many flaws in the system and with case workers, he said.

"I want to help others who are in that same situation."

#### Crisis Support

*This report covers a difficult topic and many of the personal stories include traumatic experiences including assault and identity-based violence. If you have experienced similar events or are currently struggling with these experiences, know that help is available.*

- Trans Lifeline is a trans-led organization that connects trans people to community, support, and resources to survive and thrive at 877-565-8860 or [translifeline.org](http://translifeline.org).
- Lifeline offers crisis support to all at 800-273-8255 or [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org).

**Notes:** Student stories come from personal interviews with students who volunteered to share their experiences. Names have been omitted to protect their privacy.

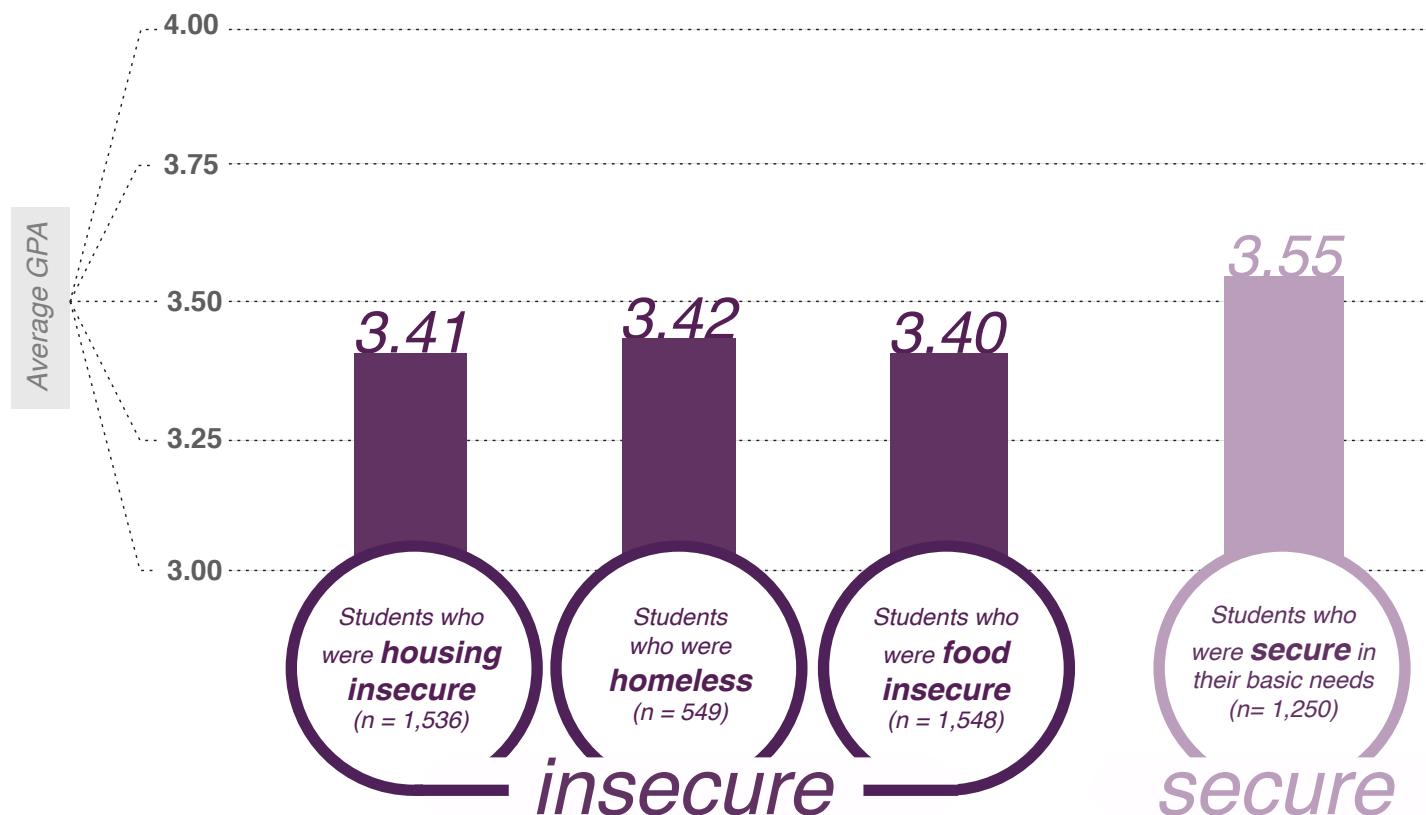
## Student Status and Academic Performance

This next section of the report focuses on student status and academic performance, and their association with basic needs insecurity.

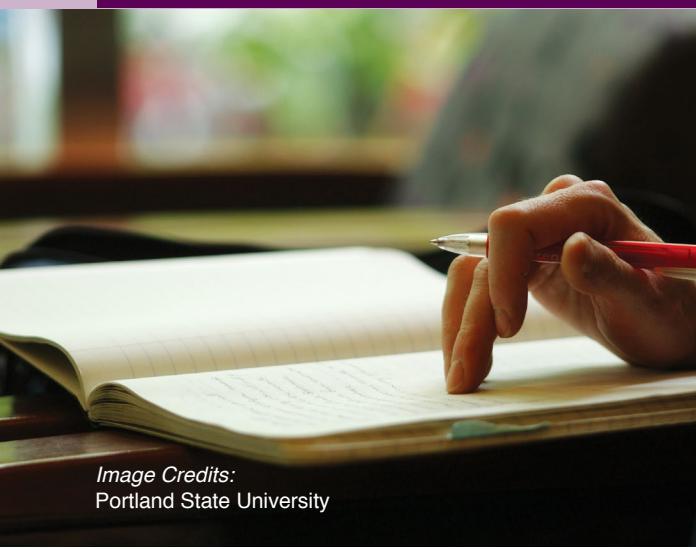
Basic needs insecurity varied according to student status and how many years students had been pursuing a degree at PSU (see Table 9). Notably, undergraduate students reported higher rates of housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity than graduate or post-baccalaureate students. Further, students who were taking either online-only classes or both in-person and online classes experienced higher rates of housing insecurity than students who were only taking in-person classes. Finally, the percentage of students who experienced food and housing insecurity increased as the number of years they had been pursuing their degree at PSU increased.

While the vast majority of students reported GPAs between 3.0 and 4.0 (the sample average was 3.47), students with basic needs insecurity reported slightly lower GPAs across each vulnerability category compared to students who were secure in their basic needs (see Figure 6).

**FIGURE 6.** Grade Point Average (GPA) According to Student Basic Needs Insecurity



**Note:** The numbers in this figure correspond to students who answered this specific question.



*Image Credits:*  
Portland State University

**TABLE 9.** Student Status and Basic Needs Insecurity

	Number of Students	Housing Insecurity	Homelessness	Food Insecurity
<b>Full or Part-Time Student</b>				
Full Time	2,848	44.9%	16.6%	48.6%
Part-Time	663	43.4%	14.3%	40.2%
<b>Degree Type</b>				
Undergraduate	2,463	47.6%	17.1%	51.6%
Graduate	887	39.1%	14.8%	37.1%
Post-Baccalaureate	161	29.2%	9.3%	32.3%
<b>Class Format</b>				
In-person classes only	1,890	40.5%	16.9%	43.4%
Online classes only	187	53.3%	13.4%	45.6%
Both in-person and online classes	702	49.0%	15.6%	51.9%
<b>Years at PSU</b>				
Less than one year	1,387	40.0%	17.8%	41.9%
One to two years	1,358	45.4%	15.7%	47.4%
Three or more years	763	51.6%	14.0%	55.7%

**Notes:** The Number of Students column indicates the number of survey respondents to our housing insecurity and homelessness measures. The number of survey respondents for the food insecurity measure may vary slightly but not substantially.

# Employment and Finances

This section of the report summarizes three important elements of students' financial situations: (1) their employment status; (2) how they pay for expenses associated with attending PSU; (3) which public assistance programs they use; and (4) their financial stress.

## Employment Status

The majority of students (72.4%,  $n = 2,543$ ) reported working for pay in the month prior to completing the survey, and 35.5% were looking for work. Over a quarter of students (28.7%) reported having more than one job. Students worked an average of 26 hours per week and reported an average monthly take-home pay of \$1,348 from all of their jobs.

Students who were looking for work experienced higher rates of each category of basic needs insecurity than students who were not looking for work.

Students who were working experienced higher rates of housing and food insecurity than those who did not work for pay; and students who worked more than one job experienced higher rates of housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity than those who were working only one job (see Table 10). There were also significant differences in monthly take-home pay for students who experienced housing insecurity, homelessness, or food insecurity compared to those who did not (see Figure 7).

**FIGURE 7.** Monthly Take-Home Pay Rates According to Student Basic Needs Insecurity



**Note:** The numbers in this figure correspond to students who were working and answered this question

**TABLE 10.** Employment Status and Student Basic Needs Insecurity

	Number of Students	Housing Insecurity	Homelessness	Food Insecurity
<b>Looked for work in the last 30 days</b>				
No	2,263	40.2%	11.7%	40.6%
Yes	1,248	52.6%	24.2%	58.7%
<b>Worked for pay in the last 30 days</b>				
No	968	37.6%	16.5%	40.9%
Yes	2,543	47.3%	16.0%	49.3%
<b>Number of Jobs for those who were working</b>				
One job	1,816	42.3%	12.8%	44.0%
More than one job	732	59.4%	23.6%	62.1%

**Notes:** The Number of Students column indicates the number of survey respondents to our housing insecurity and homelessness measures. The number of survey respondents for the food insecurity measure may vary slightly but not substantially.

“

***I am a [teaching assistant] and a [research assistant] at PSU and these two jobs together don't cover rent [and] food. I have a third job at a private company to be able to buy anything beyond basic necessities, which makes performing well in school more difficult.***

- PSU student, 2019

## How Students Pay for College

Students were asked to indicate all of the ways they pay for the expenses associated with attending Portland State University. Table 11 shows the different methods students used to pay for college expenses according to their level of basic needs insecurity, with “secure” students (i.e., those who did not experience housing insecurity, homelessness, or food insecurity) presented in the final column for comparison. The majority of students experiencing basic needs insecurity reported paying for college with income from their jobs or from student loans. Compared to “secure” students, students with basic needs insecurities were more likely to report paying for college with credit cards, Pell Grants, and student loans, and less likely to report covering their expenses with financial help from friends or family.

“

**We need  
affordable education.**

- PSU student, 2019

”

***It's difficult to get enough money to not only  
pay for tuition but also to pay for housing, food and  
transportation so I can get to work.***

- PSU student, 2019

”

***The amount charged for my masters program exceeded the  
amount of loans I was able to take out and landed me in a  
tough financial situation. The course load also doesn't allow  
for much work time... How can I learn and teach when I'm  
worried about being able to eat and live?***

- PSU student, 2019

**TABLE 11.** Ways that Students Pay for College According to Basic Needs Insecurity

	<i>insecure</i>	<i>secure</i>		
	Students who were <b>housing insecure</b> <i>n</i> = 1,567	Students who were <b>homeless</b> <i>n</i> = 567	Students who were <b>food insecure</b> <i>n</i> = 1,586	Students who were <b>secure</b> in their basic needs <i>n</i> = 1,294
Work-study job	8.6%	10.4%	10.0%	5.9%
A job that isn't work-study	63 .4%	59.4%	64.4%	50.7%
Pell Grant	46.1%	43.9%	47.6%	26.1%
Other grants from the federal or state government	33.1%	34.6%	35.5%	21.3%
Grants from Portland State	18.4%	19.4%	18.5%	16.0%
Student loans	65.5%	62.1%	65.1%	42.0%
Stipend or fellowship	6.6%	7.6%	5.6%	7.3%
Tuition remission	9.1%	11.3%	9.1%	10.1%
Help from family or friends	34.6%	34.0%	34.6%	45.3%
Savings	33.6%	36.7%	32.4%	39.4%
Credit cards	24.4%	23.8%	24.5%	10.6%
Employer support	3.7%	3.0%	2.8%	6.1%
GI Bill	2.6%	3.7%	2.0%	1.9%
Scholarship	2.7%	2.8%	3.0%	2.9%

## Use of Assistance Programs

As an additional indicator of students' financial situations, respondents were asked to select from a list of public assistance programs and report any they had used in the past 12 months. In the full sample, almost half of all students reported receiving no formal assistance in the past 12 months.

The most commonly used forms of assistance were Tax Refunds (21.8%), Medicaid (19.9%), SNAP benefits (12.9%), and off-campus food pantries (11.1%).

Students who were secure in their basic needs used these assistance programs at much lower rates than students who experienced housing insecurity, home-

lessness, or food insecurity (see Table 12). In particular, students with basic needs insecurities used SNAP, Medicaid (or equivalent public health insurance), off-campus food pantries or food banks, transportation assistance, and earned income tax credits at higher rates than students who were secure in their basic needs (see Figure 8). Even still, students with basic needs insecurity are not accessing all of the public benefits they could be relative to their level of need.

Many students described how policies related to qualification for grants or government financial aid (such as student loans, SNAP, and Medicaid) often leave them in a "gap" zone, where they cannot qualify for aid but are still financially struggling to make ends meet.



Image Credits:  
Portland State University

***Students who need food or experience housing insecurity sometimes do not meet the financial requirements for help and fall in the middle... They aren't making enough to cover expenses but making too much to qualify for grants and state funded programs like SNAP.***

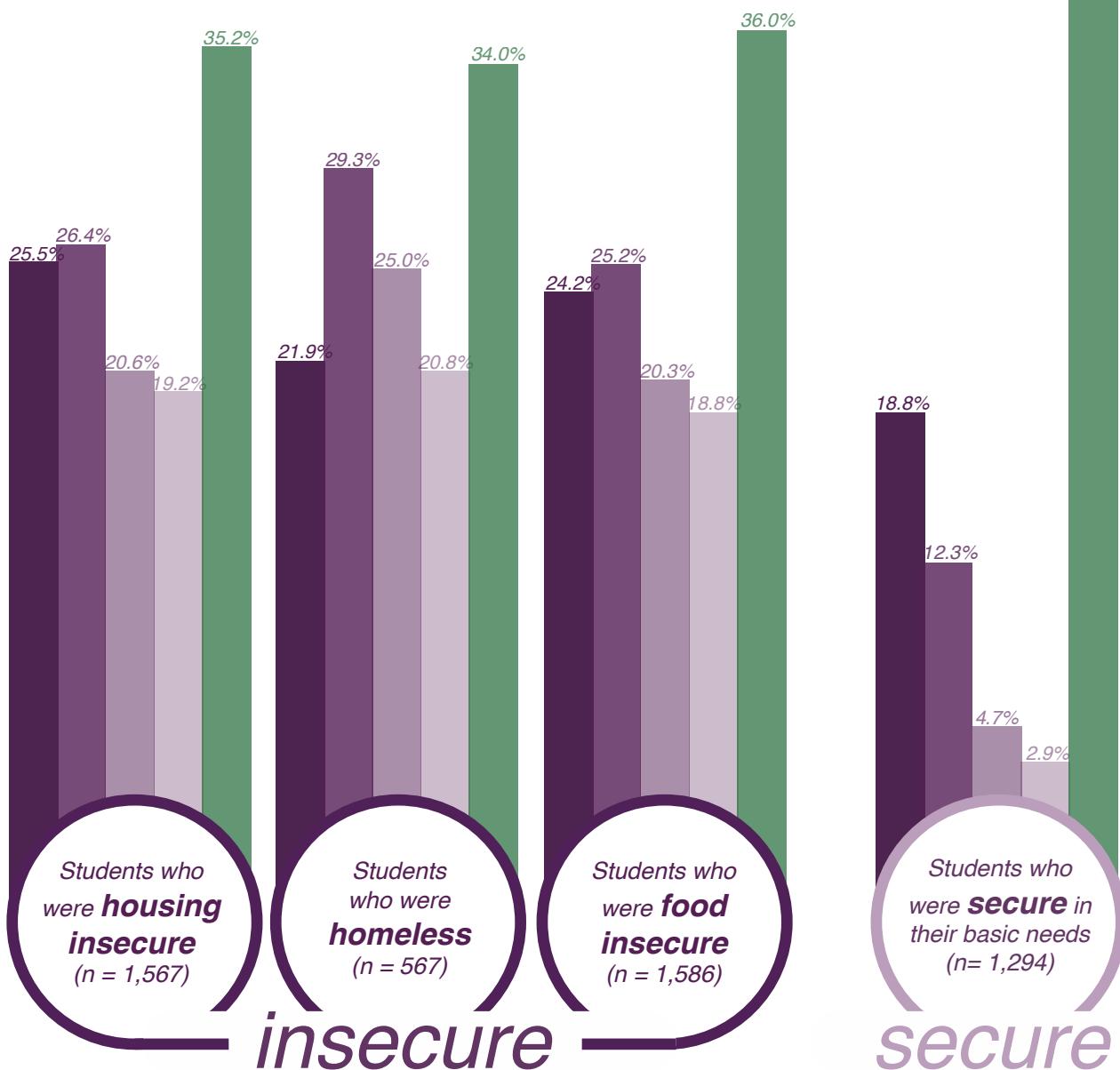
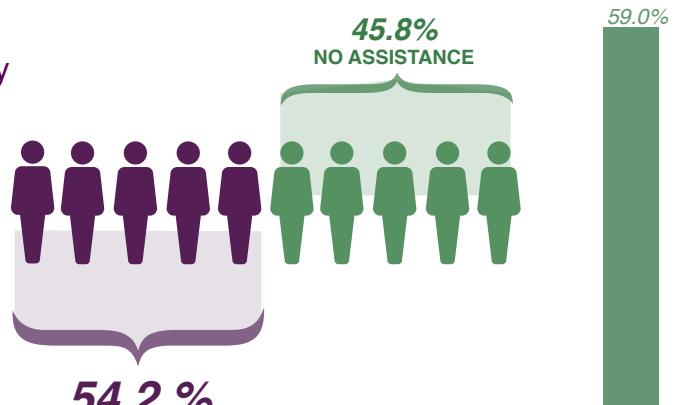
- PSU student, 2019

**TABLE 12.** Use of Public Assistance According to Student Basic Needs Insecurity

	<i>insecure</i>	<i>secure</i>		
	Students who were <b>housing insecure</b> <i>n</i> = 1,567	Students who were <b>homeless</b> <i>n</i> = 567	Students who were <b>food insecure</b> <i>n</i> = 1,586	Students who were <b>secure</b> in their basic needs <i>n</i> = 1,294
SNAP ("Food stamps," EBT)	20.6%	25.0%	20.3%	4.7%
WIC (Nutritional assistance for pregnant women and children)	2.3%	1.9%	1.9%	0.4%
TANF (Public cash assistance; formerly called ADC or ADFC)	1.5%	1.6%	1.3%	0.0%
SSI (Supplemental Security Income)	1.3%	1.4%	1.2%	0.3%
SSDI (Social Security Disability Income)	1.5%	1.9%	1.5%	0.8%
Medicaid or public health insurance	26.4%	29.3%	25.2%	12.3%
Off campus food pantry / food bank	19.2%	20.8%	18.8%	2.9%
Child care assistance / subsidy	3.2%	2.1%	2.4%	1.2%
Unemployment compensation / insurance	2.4%	2.8%	2.3%	0.9%
Utility assistance	5.0%	4.8%	4.4%	0.7%
Housing assistance	5.7%	7.4%	5.3%	1.0%
Transportation assistance	12.1%	12.7%	11.0%	6.0%
Tax refunds	25.5%	21.9%	24.2%	18.8%
Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)	8.2%	6.3%	7.4%	2.3%
Veteran's benefit	4.9%	7.1%	4.1%	3.5%
Did not access public assistance	35.2%	34.0%	36.0%	59.0%

**FIGURE 8.** Most Commonly Used Types of Public Assistance According to Student Basic Needs Insecurity

- █ Tax Refunds
- █ Medicaid
- █ SNAP benefits
- █ Off-campus food pantries
- █ No assistance



## Financial Stress

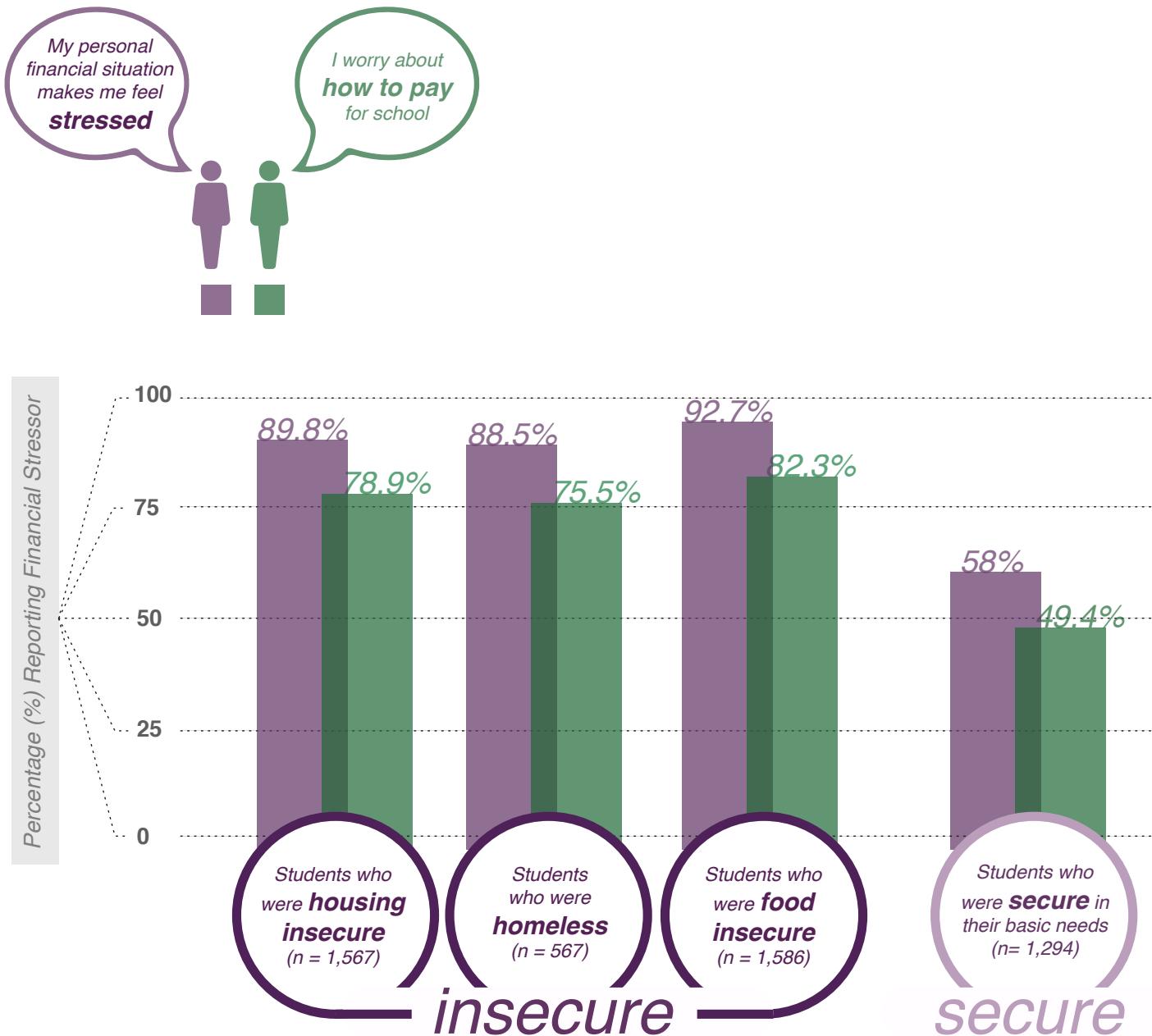
Finally, we asked a variety of questions to better understand students' levels of stress about their financial situation, some of which were inspired by the Student Financial Wellness Survey (Klepfer and colleagues, 2018). In the full sample, a majority of students (77%) indicated that their personal financial situation made them feel stressed, and 66.6% of students indicated that they worried about being able to pay for school. Approximately 30% of students reported not being able to pay some of their bills (e.g., medical bills, student loans, credit card bills) in the past year, and 41% reported having to borrow money from their friends and family to pay their bills. Almost 20% of students reported having to take or add academic credits in the past year so they would qualify for financial aid, which many students use to help pay for their basic needs (see Figure 9).

As Figure 10 illustrates, students who experienced housing insecurity, homelessness, and/or food insecurity were more likely to report that that financial situation made them feel stressed, and also that they worried about how to pay for school, compared to those who were secure in their basic needs.

**FIGURE 9.** Financial Stress Related to Financial Aid



*Image Credits:  
Portland State University*

**FIGURE 10.** Financial Stress According to Student Basic Needs Insecurity

Note: The numbers in this figure correspond to students who answered this specific question.

**Stress around money (not having enough, wondering where it will come from, how will I pay for things such as housing and food costs) has been consistent and affects my mental well-being as well as impacts my concentration and academic successfulness.**

- PSU student, 2019

## Student Stories

### A survivor's journey

She fled with her son to an apartment of their own where they would be safe from her partner.

A few months later she received a no-cause eviction. The next apartment was worse. She left after she was sexually assaulted there. This time, she had nowhere to go.

As a full-time student, she could not meet the requirement of earning two times the monthly rent. Some shelters turned her away because she refused to leave her son or send him in with the adult men.

"There is no way that we were going to separate," she said.

They spent the next four years living in a combination of shelters, transitional housing, a rented room, and even her car. Shelters were the hardest. They were often infested with bed bugs and plagued by theft. Staff had little training and oversight, which led to abuses.

"It's as if you're in a crime scene that never stops," she said. "You're a perpetual victim."

Her son lived with her dad for a while and couch surfed with friends. Sometimes she would splurge for a hotel room for the weekend so they could spend time together as a family, swimming, watching TV.

She transferred to Portland State University in fall 2018. The Financial Aid Office helped her get enough money to find a place of her own.

This summer, she graduated with a degree in social science. She plans to attend graduate school and eventually earn her doctorate.

- Recent PSU graduate
- Experienced homelessness for four years
- Student parent
- Experiencing housing insecurity

"I have been through one of the worst parts of my life," she said, "and I survived."

The experience "helped me step back and think 'how can I help.' It helped me understand what is broken in the system," she said, "where I can make a difference."

Despite her degree, she still struggles with housing insecurity. Rents have skyrocketed while wages have not.

Her current apartment costs almost double what it went for eight years ago. It's also infested with carpet beetles and needs repairs that her landlord refuses to make. She's trying to organize the tenants, but she worries she might get evicted.

"I know what homelessness feels like and the devastation," she said, "that fear that you're not going to be able to afford your home and that fear that you're going to be homeless again."

“

**I know what homelessness feels like and the devastation... that fear that you're not going to be able to afford your home and that fear that you're going to be homeless again.**

#### Crisis Support

*This report covers a difficult topic and many of the personal stories include traumatic experiences including assault and identity-based violence. If you have experienced similar events or are currently struggling with these experiences, know that help is available.*

- RAINN offers support to survivors of sexual assault at 800-656-HOPE or [www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org).
- National Domestic Violence Hotline offers support to survivors at 800-799-7233, text LOVEIS to 866-331-9474 or [www.thehotline.org](http://www.thehotline.org).
- Lifeline offers crisis support to all at 800-273-8255 or [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org).

**Notes:** Student stories come from personal interviews with students who volunteered to share their experiences. Names have been omitted to protect their privacy.

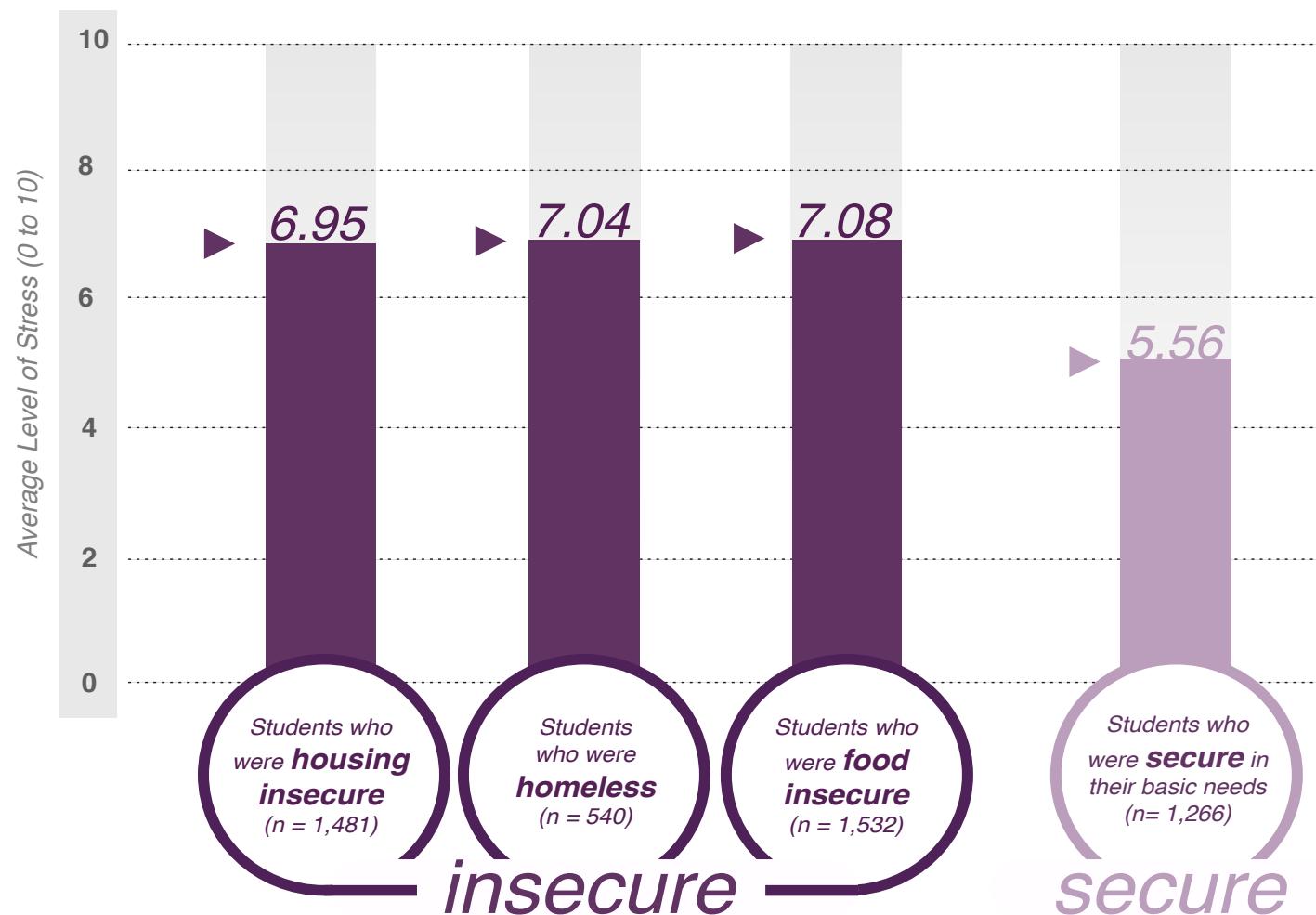
## Health Indicators

Given the importance of housing and food security to overall health and well-being, students were asked a variety of questions about their physical and mental health, including their general levels of stress, how much their health interfered with their daily activities, and how many hours of sleep they averaged each night.

### Stress

We first asked students to report the level of stress they had experienced in the past week on a scale of *0 = no stress* to *10 = extreme stress*. As Figure 11 demonstrates, students who experienced housing insecurity, homelessness, or food insecurity had higher levels of stress compared to students who were secure in their basic needs.

**FIGURE 11.** Level of Stress According to Student Basic Needs Insecurity



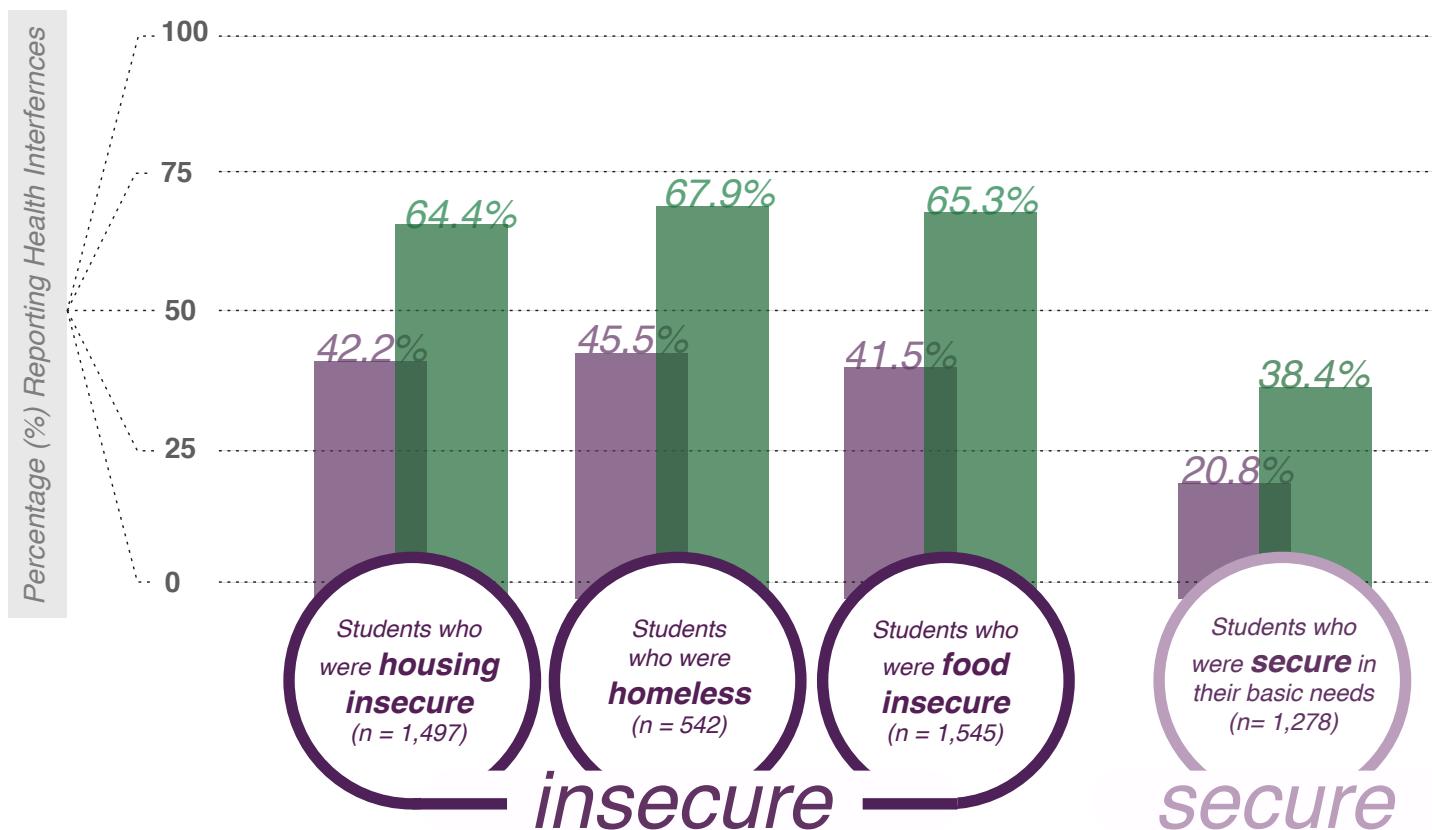
**Note:** The numbers in this figure correspond to students who answered this specific question.

## Physical and Mental Health Interferences

Students were also asked to indicate the extent to which their physical and mental health interfered with their daily activities in the past month, from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *extremely*. Students who reported *moderately, quite a bit, or extremely* were categorized as having physical and/or mental health interferences. Students who experienced housing insecurity, homelessness, or food insecurity reported significantly higher rates of physical and mental health interferences compared to students who were secure in their basic needs (see Figure 12).

**FIGURE 12.** Health Interferences According to Student Basic Needs Insecurity

Physical Health Interference  
Mental Health Interference



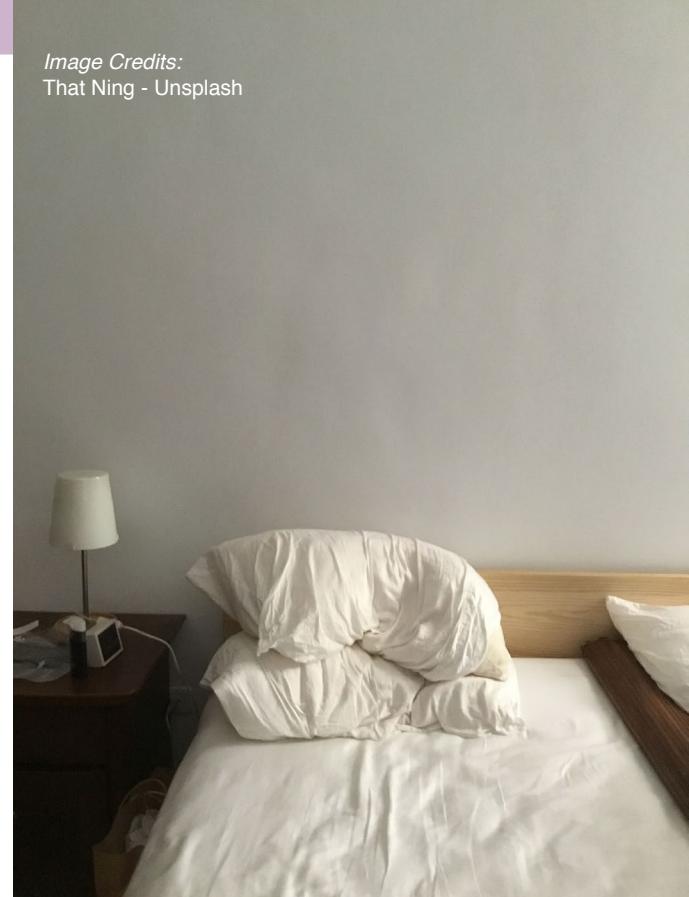
Note: The numbers in this figure correspond to students who answered this specific question.

**[My] disability [has] taken a severe toll on my finances and overall ability to function in school. Being a part-time graduate student for a year because of my health issues precluded me from getting a graduate assistantship that could have made me more self-sufficient.**

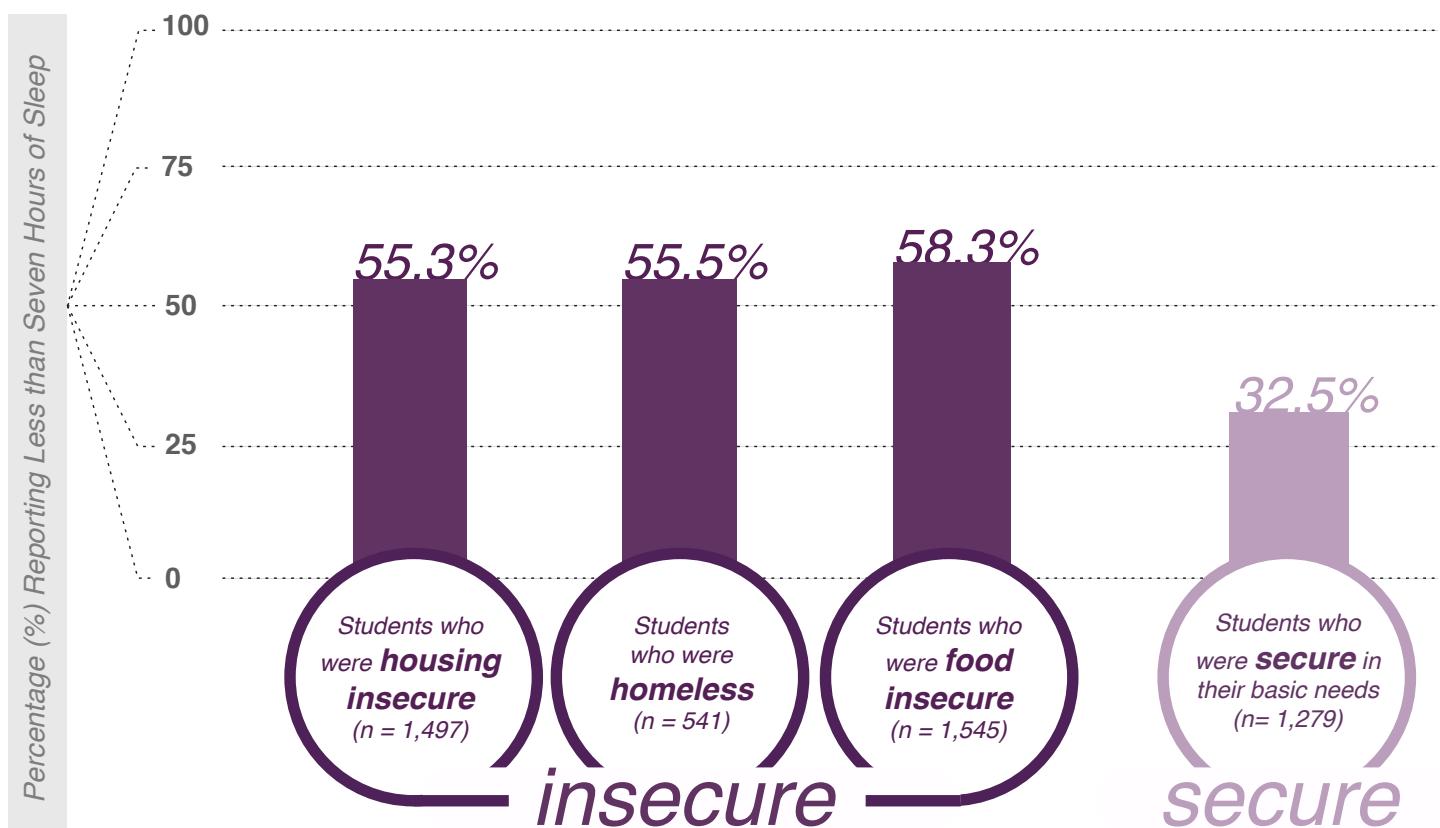
- PSU student, 2019

## Sleep

Finally, we asked students to report how much sleep they get each night. In the full sample of students, 54% reported that they sleep seven or more hours per night, while 46% reported sleeping fewer than seven hours per night. A significantly larger percentage of students reported sleeping fewer than seven hours per night if they experienced housing insecurity, homelessness, or food insecurity in the past year compared to students who were secure in their basic needs (see Figure 13). This is in line with other research demonstrating the challenges people experiencing homelessness have obtaining a sufficient amount of quality sleep (Taylor et al., 2019). It also serves as an additional risk factor for reduced physical and mental health, as well as academic performance.



**FIGURE 13.** Percentage of Students Who Slept Fewer than Seven Hours Per Night According to Basic Needs Insecurity



**Note:** The numbers in this figure correspond to students who answered this specific question.

## Social Connectedness and Belonging

Social connectedness and belonging can be challenging for students who struggle with basic needs insecurity. We assessed two types of social connectedness in this study.

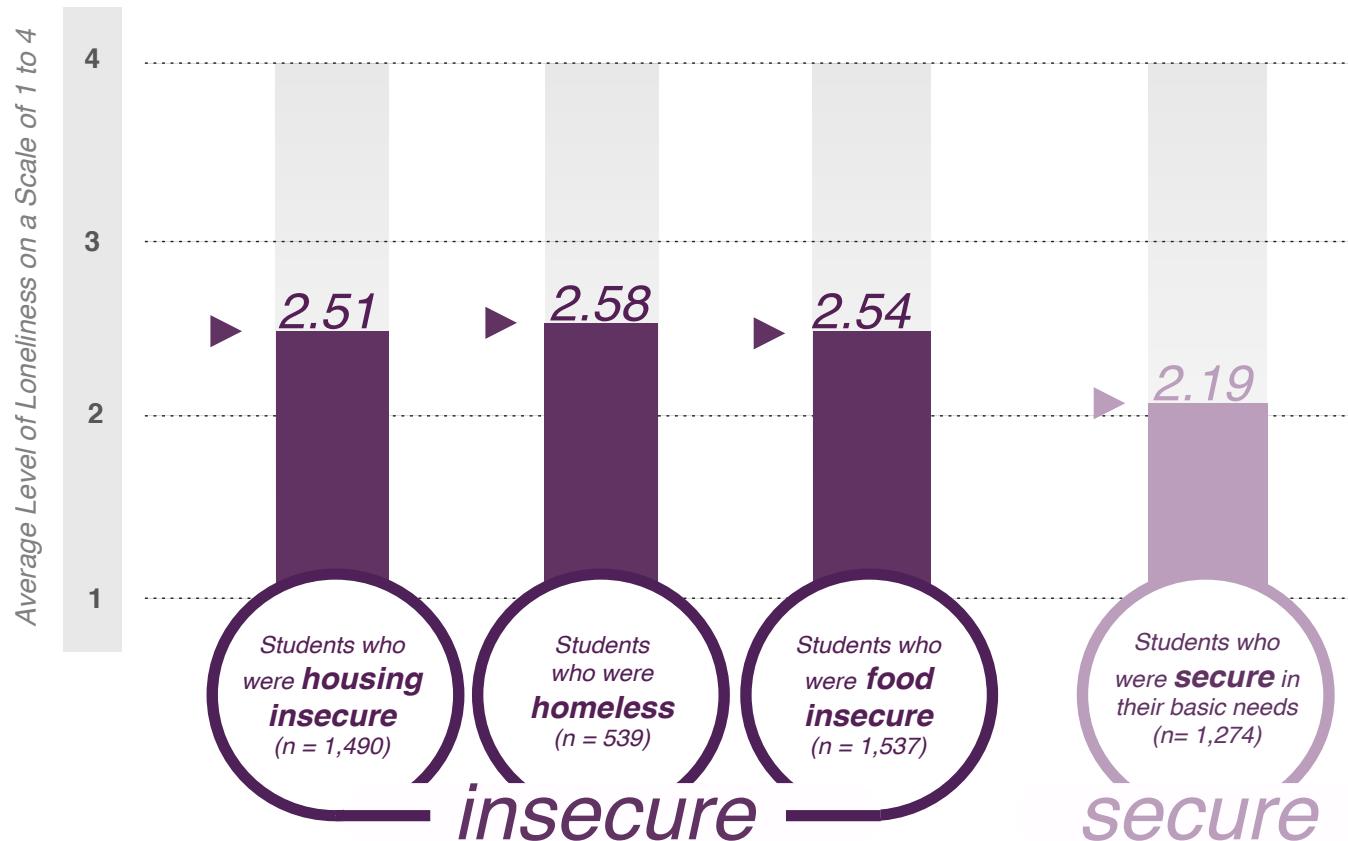
### Loneliness

First, we used a four-item version of the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Ferguson, 1978) to measure rates of loneliness and isolation among students. Although rates of loneliness were moderate across the sample, averaging 2.37 on a scale of 1 to 4, students experiencing housing insecurity, homelessness, or food insecurity reported higher levels of loneliness than students who were secure in their basic needs (see Figure 14). Further, around 75% of students with basic needs insecurities reported feeling sometimes or always isolated from others (see Figure 15), compared to just over half of students who were secure in their needs.

**FIGURE 15.** Rates of Isolation Among Students with Basic Needs Insecurity



**FIGURE 14.** Loneliness According to Student Basic Needs Insecurity



**Note:** The numbers in this figure correspond to students who answered this specific question.

Image Credits:  
Portland State University



## Campus Sense of Community

We also asked students how strong of a sense of community they feel with others at Portland State University using one item from the Brief Sense of Community Index (Long & Perkins, 2003). Very few students reported feeling a strong sense of community, and overall rates of sense of community did not differ substantially depending on basic needs insecurity (see Table 13). Because PSU is primarily a commuter school within a large urban setting, it may be harder for students to develop strong close relationships with other students and employees on campus.

**TABLE 13.** Campus Sense of Community According to Student Basic Needs Insecurity

	<i>insecure</i>		<i>secure</i>	
	Students who were <b>housing insecure</b> <i>n</i> = 1,479	Students who were <b>homeless</b> <i>n</i> = 536	Students who were <b>food insecure</b> <i>n</i> = 1,520	Students who were <b>secure</b> in their basic needs <i>n</i> = 1,266
Very little sense of community	37.9%	39.6%	37.3%	31.3%
Something in between	54.6%	52.8%	55.4%	59.4%
Strong sense of community	7.4%	7.6%	7.3%	9.3%

**Note:** The numbers in this table correspond to students who answered this specific question.

## Student Explanations for Basic Needs Insecurity

The final question of the survey provided space for students to write anything else they wanted to share with us about their housing and food needs, to which over 600 students submitted responses. Almost half of these responses related to their financial concerns. Many of the students discussed having to make difficult choices about which of their basic needs to prioritize given their very limited budgets. Students framed many of their financial challenges around the cost of attending PSU and the cost of living in Portland.

“

***Increased fees and tuition, poverty-level stipends, and an expensive housing market make attending school difficult.***

- PSU student, 2019

Image Credits:  
Portland State University



## Costs of Attending PSU

Over 200 students described how costs related to the tuition and fees associated with attending PSU make it so that they are often unable to afford food or housing, even while working extra jobs as a full-time student.

Further, some students described how the payment plan options for tuition and other PSU policies contribute to their financial difficulties. Finally, some students expressed frustration that required fees that go toward resources they do not use (such as health insurance or student recreation center fees) could be better spent on their basic needs.

“

*The financial aid breakdown should have included childcare and all tuition, fees, and a small amount for personal expenses.*

*I can't take out more federal loans to cover child care costs because my financial aid award status indicates that the loans I already have are sufficient, even though they are not.*

- PSU student, 2019

*The fact that all financial assistance is based on my income from two years ago has been the hardest thing for me. My EFC [Expected Family Contribution] is high due to it, despite not reflecting the true nature of the reality, thus my access to student loans is incredibly low... I am somehow supposed to live off of \$700 (after tuition) per term.*

- PSU student, 2019

”

*I only have \$300 per month for food, utilities, and gas. It is extremely frustrating to be charged an extra few hundred dollars for the PSU gym and health center... I live off campus in Hillsboro and am covered by my father's medical insurance... The \$200-300 I would save by not paying extra fees to PSU would give me more food and gas to heat my home... I really wish there was an option for non-degree seeking students to waive those fees.*

- PSU student, 2019

## Costs of Living

Students also explained how the high cost of living in Portland combined with the cost of attending PSU negatively impacts their basic needs security. Nearly 100 students discussed how their many financial concerns force them into a losing dilemma of which basic needs to prioritize, which negatively impacts their health and academic performance.

“

*Food is very expensive in Portland, and I try to budget since I am paying mostly my own way through school... I try to leave [food assistance programs] for others and families who truly need it and supplement by eating one true meal a day and snack(s) to stick to my budget.*

- PSU student, 2019

”

*I make decent money in my job, but the cost of school incidentals, the cost of food, the cost of rent, the cost of medical -- basically the cost of living -- makes it feel as though I go hand to mouth.*

- PSU student, 2019

“

*Since I moved to Portland about four years ago the costs associated with living (groceries, rent, utilities, etc.) have drastically increased. As a full time student working two jobs just to live on campus, it doesn't seem like enough, and I am considering taking on a third job/occupation to secure more money.*

*The constant stress of not being able to afford food and having to make monthly payments on ridiculously large bills is starting to take a heavy toll on my mental health to the point that I need to see a doctor/therapist for depression. My relationship at home is degrading and I am also considering taking a couple terms off from school to save money.*

- PSU student, 2019

Over 230 students discussed challenges associated with food security in their comments. Students discussed the high cost of food as well as difficulty accessing free food resources, such as the Food Pantry and Free Food Market.

*I am very concerned with the cost of food (groceries), the cost of food being the second largest of my recurring expenses just after housing and before recurring expenses of utilities/fuel/transportation.*

- PSU student, 2019

*While the food pantry and market are a good start to resources here on campus, their hours of operation and availability makes it extremely hard to use for anyone who is trying to attend school full time while maintaining at least a 20-hour workweek. The pantry especially should be open outside the hours of 9-5 as a majority of people who really need resources like this, simply can't take the time to wait in the line during those hours.*

- PSU student, 2019



Image Credits:  
Portland State University

Around 200 students also discussed the high cost of housing in Portland and how their income is not sufficient to address all of their financial needs. Students described how on-campus housing is neither affordable nor adequate to meet their needs. Considering the high cost of living in Portland, many students either must choose between housing and other basic needs, or they choose housing options that are more affordable but take a toll on students' lives in other ways, such as their safety. Alternatively, some students opted to live farther from campus and commute to PSU, which can create challenges related to the high costs of commuting and/or parking on campus. A few students provided suggestions for ways that PSU can help address housing costs for students, including working with the Section 8 housing assistance program to help students and their families.

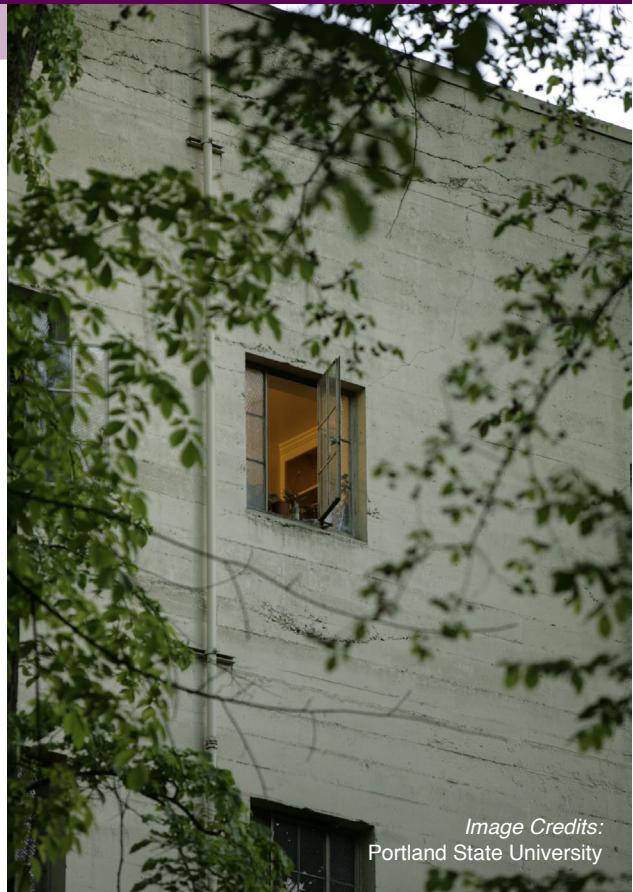


Image Credits:  
Portland State University

“

*I am trapped where I am because the cost of housing, food, and insurance, and education, are so high I cannot afford to live on my own.*

- PSU student, 2019

”

*To afford housing, I live an hour by public transit from PSU. Taking two hours out of the day to travel to and from the university makes it tough to do meal prep and cook healthy meals. I also live in a location that isn't particularly walkable, so without a car it's difficult to do a full grocery run or even just stay healthy from getting exercise around the neighborhood.*

- PSU student, 2019

## Student Stories

### Recovery

For five years he cycled through sleeping on the streets, in shelters, in transitional housing and back again.

He would climb his way to recovery reaching the three-month mark, the six-month mark, and then relapse, tumbling down to houselessness. In sober living, you lose your shelter when you lose your way.

"The (eviction) laws don't apply the same," he said, "I would find myself on the streets, or couch surfing, or in a treatment center."

Being HIV positive opened doors for him, he said, including access to inpatient drug treatment, free transitional housing, and good health insurance.

Then he would lose what little he had, again.

"For me that was the hardest part," he said. "I felt like a nobody. I was tired of having to go into treatment centers and deal with homophobia."

In 2015, he started a recovery journey that led him back to school.

***I felt like a nobody. I was tired of having to go into treatment centers and deal with homophobia.***



- Graduate student
- Experienced homelessness and housing insecurity for five years
- Student in Recovery

"I needed to do something with my life...use the skills I have, use the brain I have to make the world a better place," he said.

Cascade AIDS Project, Transition Projects, and Central City Concern helped the most in the beginning. He started working, volunteering, and even singing in a choir. He volunteered at a student organization helping others access resources and fundraising for student scholarships.

He is now working on a graduate degree in speech language pathology and hopes to graduate in 2022.

He is five years clean and sober.

He would love to see more low-income housing for families and for the LGBTQ community as well as better addiction support and shelters that serve gay and trans individuals.

"I can't believe that trans people continue to be subjected to violence and harassment (in shelters). It's not sustainable."

"I want to help others who are in that same situation."

#### Crisis Support

This report covers a difficult topic and many of the personal stories include traumatic experiences including assault and identity-based violence. If you have experienced similar events or are currently struggling with these experiences, know that help is available.

- The Trevor Project offers support to LGBTQ youth who are in crisis at 866-488-7386, text Start to 678-678, or [www.thetrevorproject.org](http://www.thetrevorproject.org).
- Trans Lifeline is a trans-led organization that connects trans people to community, support, and resources to survive and thrive at 877-565-8860 or [translifeline.org](http://translifeline.org).
- Lifeline offers crisis support to all at 800-273-8255 or [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org).
- Oregon's Alcohol and Drug Helpline is available at 800-923-4357

**Notes:** Student stories come from personal interviews with students who volunteered to share their experiences. Names have been omitted to protect their privacy.

---

# **Results**

---

*Employees*

# Employee Results

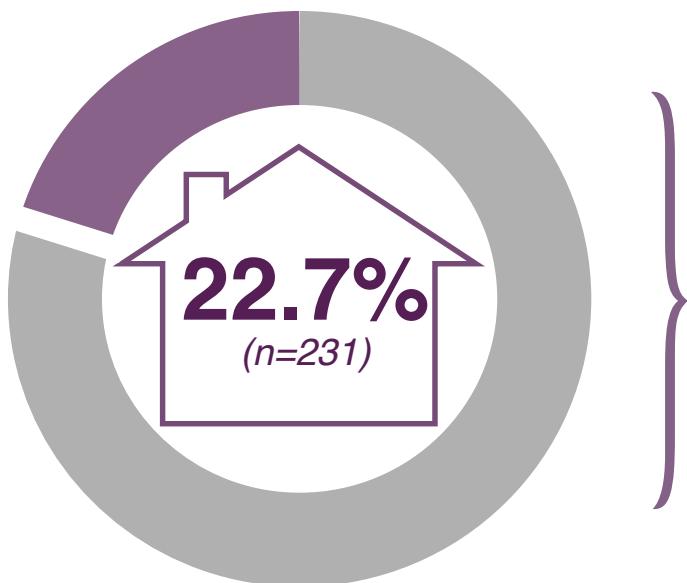
## Prevalence of Basic Needs Insecurity Among Employees Employee Housing Insecurity

Housing insecurity includes a range of housing issues, including a lack of affordability, safety, quality, and consistency in housing. Housing insecurity among PSU employees was assessed using a nine-item set of questions developed by the Hope Center asking about employees' ability to pay rent and utilities, frequency of moving, and leaving housing because they feel unsafe. We also included three items from previous studies of campus basic needs insecurity (e.g., California State University, NC State University) asking about evictions or being forced to leave housing. All questions asked about employees' experiences in the 12 months prior to completing the survey in Fall 2019 (see Table 14).

In our employee sample, 22.7% of respondents ( $n = 231$ ) reported experiencing at least one form of housing insecurity in the past 12 months (see Figure 16). Experiencing a rent or mortgage increase that made it difficult to pay was the most commonly reported form of housing insecurity.

We also asked about a range of other experiences pertaining to housing vulnerability. Almost 3% of employees reported living in a home that is owned by a local housing authority or public agency, and 0.5% reported receiving a public voucher (e.g., Section 8) to subsidize the cost of their housing. When asked how safe they feel where they currently live, 22.7% of employees indicated feeling only somewhat safe, 1.7% indicated feeling a little bit safe, and 0.8% indicated feeling not at all safe. Finally, 0.5% employees ( $n = 5$ ) reported that they slept somewhere on the PSU campus in the past year because they had nowhere else to go.

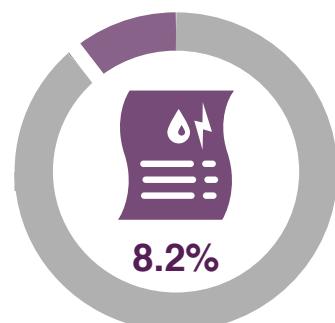
**FIGURE 16.** Employees Who Experienced at Least One Form of Housing Insecurity in the Past 12 Months



*The most common forms of housing insecurity were with:*



*A RENT OR MORGAGE INCREASE THAT MADE IT DIFFICULT TO PAY*



*NOT PAYING OR UNDERPAYING UTILITY BILLS*

**TABLE 14.** Housing Insecurity Among Employees Over the Past 12 Months

Housing Insecurity Indicators	Percentage Experiencing
Experienced at least one form of housing insecurity	22.7%
Experienced a rent or mortgage increase that made it difficult to pay	9.5%
Did not pay the full amount of a gas, oil, water, or electricity bill	8.2%
Had an account default or go into collections	6.7%
Moved in with another person because of financial problems	5.9%
Did not pay or underpaid your rent or mortgage	3.4%
Lived with others beyond the expected capacity of the house or apartment	2.3%
Joined someone else's housing without telling the landlord	2.0%
Left the place you were staying at because you felt unsafe	1.4%
Moved three or more times	0.9%
Got thrown out of the place you were staying at by someone else in the household	0.7%
Got evicted from your home	0.6%
Received a summons to appear in housing court	0.0%

*n* = 1,017

“

*I had to move from downtown Portland to Beaverton because of rent increase... Parking fees and gas were added to my budget and less walking created health issues. And my partner lost his job then we chose cheaper food options that are not healthy choices... I feel like once you step off the “right track” there is no way to get back up even though I finished my masters degree at PSU and worked at PSU for 12 years. It is embarrassing and upsetting.*

- PSU employee, 2019

## Employee Homelessness

Homelessness refers to not having a fixed, regular, or adequate place to live. To assess homelessness among PSU employees, we first asked about lifetime experiences with homelessness. Thirteen percent of employees ( $n = 131$ ) reported that they had experienced homelessness at some point in their life, with 35.6% of those ( $n = 47$ ) indicating that they experienced homelessness before age 18.

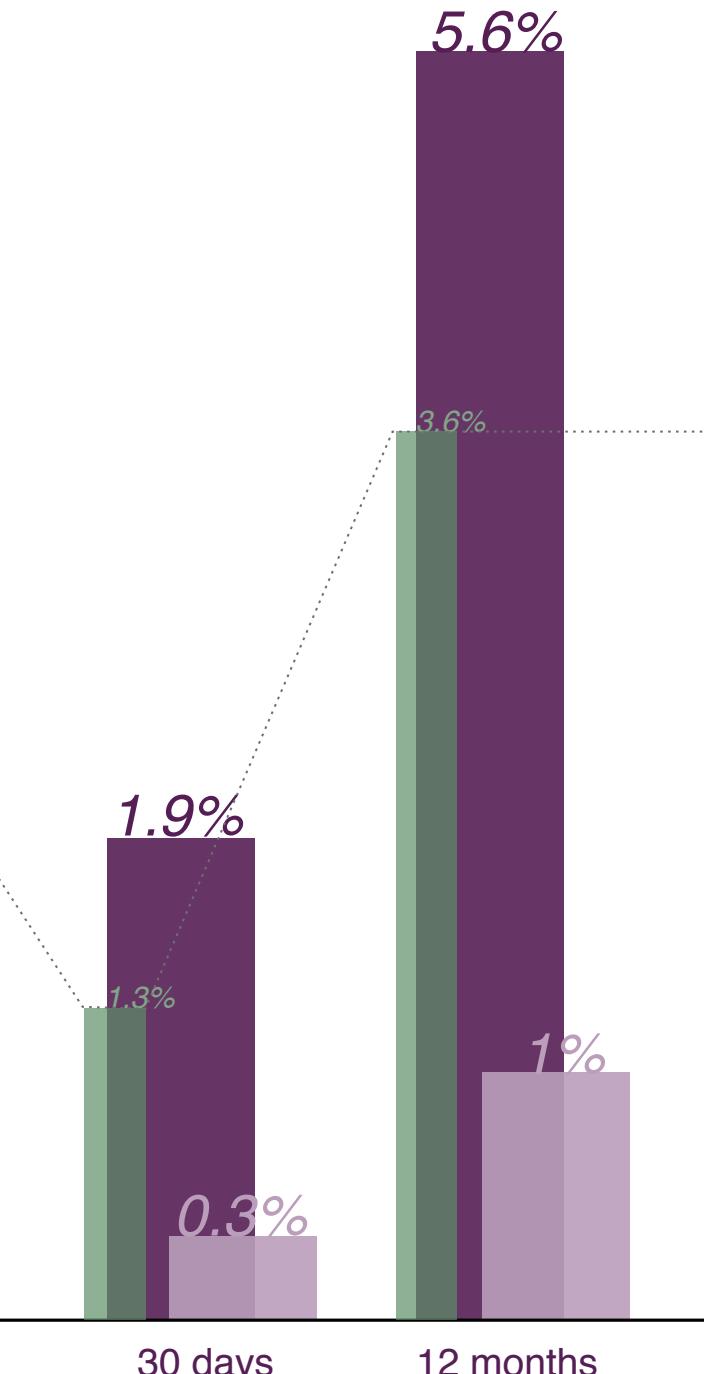
Following the approach used by the Hope Center and other campus basic needs surveys, we then asked employees to self-identify as experiencing homelessness in the past 30 days and last 12 months. In total, 0.3% of employees ( $n = 3$ ) self-identified as homeless in the past 30 days and 1% ( $n = 10$ ) self-identified as homeless in the past 12 months. However, as Table 15 illustrates, when we asked employees about the places they had stayed in the past 30 days and past 12 months using a measure of homelessness based on definitions from both the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Department of Education (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2017), the numbers increased dramatically.

Specifically, 1.9% of employees in our sample ( $n = 9$ ) indicated experiencing some form of homelessness in the past 30 days, while 5.6% ( $n = 57$ ) had experienced some form of homelessness in the past 12 months (see Figure 17).

The most commonly experienced form of homelessness was temporarily staying with a relative or friend, which is also referred to as doubled-up or “couch surfing.” It is important to use this expanded, more inclusive definition of homelessness because many employees may not consider themselves homeless if they are not sleeping outside or in a shelter. Using a more restrictive definition of homelessness may discourage employees living in doubled-up situations from seeking out resources and receiving the support they need to become more stably housed.

**FIGURE 17. Employees Who Experienced Homelessness in the Past 30 Days or 12 Months**

- Employees who self-identify as homeless
- Employees who fall under the broader definition of homeless based on the places they reported staying overnight



**TABLE 15.** Homelessness Among Employees in the Past 30 Days and 12 Months

Locations Stayed Overnight (Employees were asked to select all that apply):	Past 30 days	Past 12 months
Stayed at any of the following locations	1.9%	5.6%
Temporarily staying with a relative, friend, or couch surfing until I find other housing	1.3%	3.6%
An outdoor location such as street, sidewalk, or alley, bus or train stop, campground or woods, park, bench, or riverbed, under bridge or overpass	0.3%	1.1%
Temporarily at a hotel or motel without a permanent home to return to (not on vacation or business travel)	0.2%	0.9%
In a closed area/space with a roof not meant for human habitation such as an abandoned building, car or truck, van, RV, camper, encampment or tent, or unconverted garage, attic, or basement	0.2%	0.7%
At a treatment center (such as detox, hospital, etc.)	0.1%	0.4%
At a shelter	0.0%	0.2%
In a transitional housing or independent living program	0.0%	0.2%
At a group home such as a halfway house or residential program for mental health or substance abuse	0.0%	0.1%

*n* = 1,017



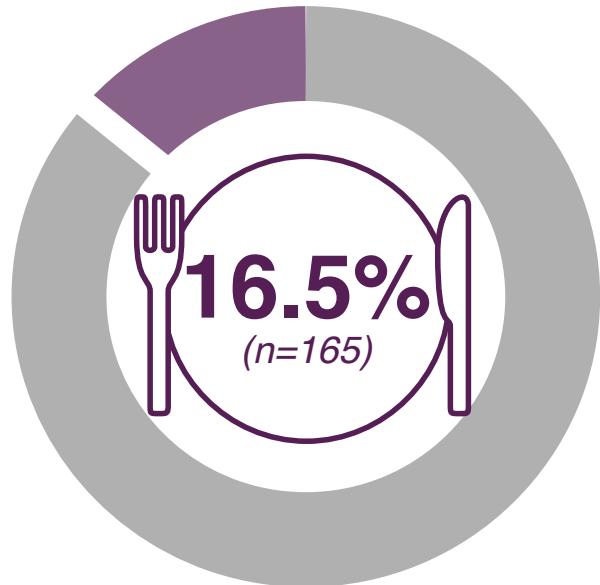
## Employee Food Insecurity

Food insecurity refers to an individual's or household's inability to access adequate food due to limited money or other resources. We used the U.S. Department of Agriculture's 18-item measure to assess rates of food insecurity in the past 30 days (USDA, 2012). The measure includes 10 items assessing a variety of food situations (see Table 16), with eight additional items asked only to employees with children in their households.

In total, 16.5% of employees ( $n = 165$ ) experienced food insecurity in the past 30 days (see Figure 18), with 8.2% at the low level of food security and 8.3% at the very low level of food security according to the number of food insecurity statements that applied to them. Over 20% of employees reported not being able to afford to eat balanced meals.

Of the 288 employees who indicated living in households with children under age 18 present, 11.8% ( $n = 34$ ) reported having to rely on only a few kinds of low-cost food to feed children in their household because they were running out of money to buy food. Approximately 8% ( $n = 24$ ) reported not being able to feed children in their household a balanced meal because they could not afford to.

Employees were also asked to indicate whether they had ever used the PSU Free Food Market. Approximately 12% had used the Free Food Market, 9% did not know there was a Free Food Market, and 78.9% had not utilized the Free Food Market.



**FIGURE 18.** Employees Who Experienced Food Insecurity in the Past 30 Days

*We put food on credit cards when we run out of money during the month. And then my husband works a second job to catch us up.*

- PSU employee, 2019

**TABLE 16.** Food Insecurity Among Employees in the Past 30 Days

Food Insecurity Statements	Percentage Experiencing
I couldn't afford to eat balanced meals.	20.5%
I worried whether my food would run out before I got money to buy more.	17.8%
I cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food.	14.8%
I ate less than I felt I should because there wasn't enough money for food.	13.0%
The food that I bought just didn't last and I didn't have enough money to get more.	12.0%
I cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food (3 or more times in the past 30 days).	11.1%
I was hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food.	8.7%
I lost weight because there wasn't enough money for food.	4.6%
I did not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food.	2.0%
I did not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food (3 or more times in the past 30 days).	1.8%

*n* = 1,003

*I try to keep my family fed with healthy food but the cost of healthy food in the Portland metro area is quite high. It typically costs me between \$900-\$1,000 a month to feed a family of four...Having to spend over a quarter of my take home pay on food is difficult.*

- PSU employee, 2019

“

*I am not usually able to afford food, but I go to a lot of food pantries to sustain the food in my household and for my son. He also gets free lunches from the food program from his school.*

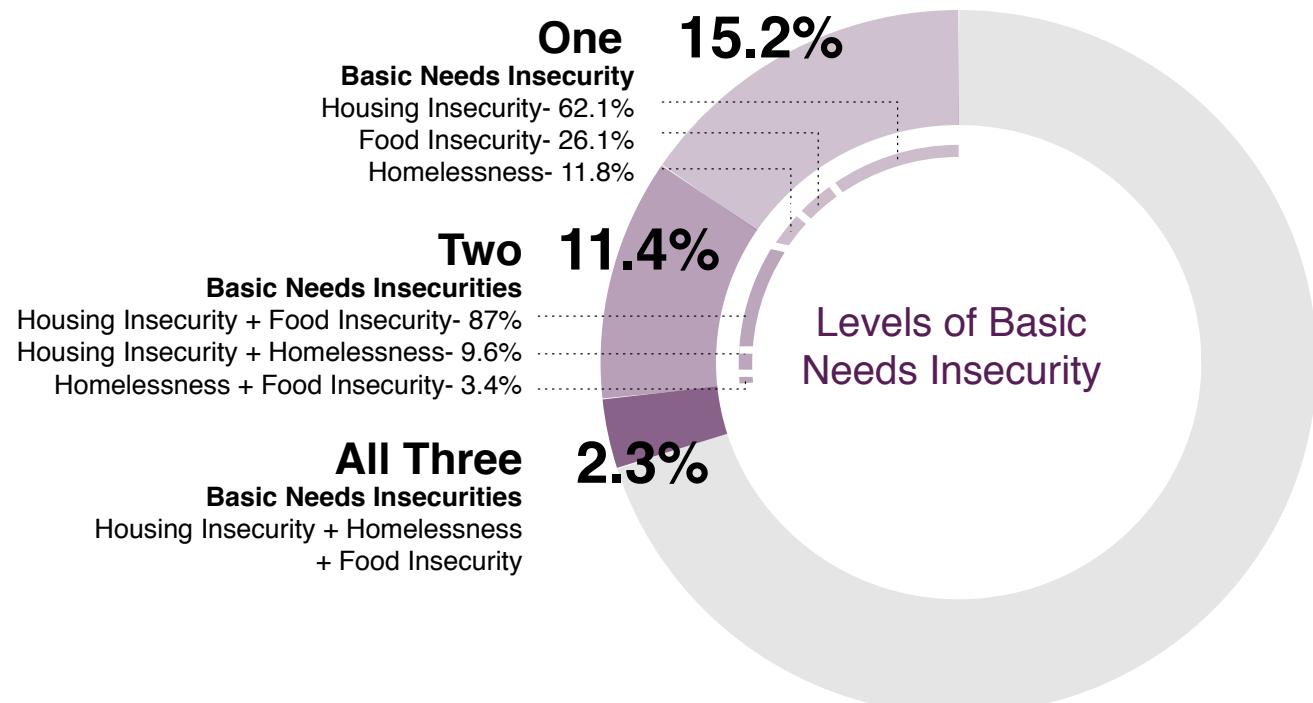
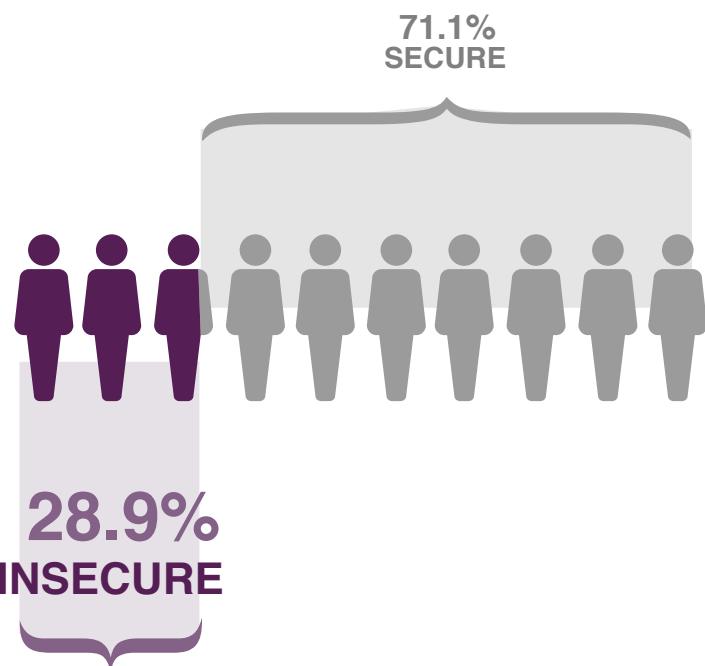
- PSU employee, 2019

## Intersections of Housing Insecurity, Homelessness, and Food Insecurity

Basic needs insecurities often overlap, with some people experiencing both housing and food insecurity, or a mix of housing insecurity and homelessness (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019). Basic needs insecurity can also vary over time. Secure employees were those with no basic needs insecurities (housing insecurity, homelessness, or food insecurity). Employees who were categorized as insecure were those with at least one vulnerability in their basic needs, meaning they experienced housing insecurity, homelessness, and/or food insecurity in the past year. Finally, some employees faced challenges with all of their basic needs, meaning they experienced housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity in the past year.

Figure 19 displays the overlapping challenges employees face when trying to meet their basic needs, with 28.9% of PSU employees experiencing some form of basic needs insecurity in the past year.

**FIGURE 19.** Intersections of Housing Insecurity, Homelessness, and Food Insecurity Among PSU Employees



# Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurity

Homelessness disproportionately affects communities of color, particularly Black and Indigenous people, as well as LGBTQ+ individuals and people with disabilities. Previous research has demonstrated disparities in basic needs insecurity among college students (e.g., Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018; Goldrick-Rab et al, 2019), and the same is likely to be true among people working in higher education. In this section, we report disparities in rates of housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity by employee demographics, disabilities or medical conditions, and life experiences. From this point forward, employee rates of housing insecurity and homelessness refer to their experiences in the 12 months prior to completing the survey, and food insecurity to the past 30 days.

## Race and Ethnicity

Rates of basic needs insecurity were lowest among White and Asian or Asian American employees and varied considerably across other racial and ethnic groups (see Table 17). Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino/a/x, and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander employees experienced the highest rates of housing and food insecurity. Black or African American employees and Middle Eastern or North African employees experienced the highest rates of homelessness.

**TABLE 17.** Disparities in Employee Basic Needs Insecurity by Race and Ethnicity

Race or Ethnicity	Number of Employees	Housing Insecurity	Homelessness	Food Insecurity
Asian or Asian American	62	17.7%	1.6%	12.9%
Black or African American	24	45.8%	12.5%	37.5%
Hispanic or Latino/a/x	70	40.0%	7.1%	30.6%
Middle Eastern or North African	10	40.0%	20.0%	0.0%
Multiracial	32	31.3%	9.4%	28.1%
Native American	12	25.0%	8.3%	16.7%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	10	50.0%	0.0%	30.0%
White	817	20.9%	5.6%	13.7%

**Notes:** Race and ethnicity classifications in the table above are not mutually exclusive. Employees were asked to select all that apply to them from the list above, and rates of basic needs insecurities are reported according to their self-identifications. This approach can sometimes mask disparities that exist between groups, so we also calculated rates of needs insecurities for employees who identified only as White and not any other race or ethnicity. When examined in this manner, rates of housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity decreased by around one percentage point for White employees. The Number of Employees column indicates the number of survey respondents to our housing insecurity and homelessness measures. The number of survey respondents for the food insecurity measure may vary slightly but not substantially.

## Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

Transgender, non-binary, genderqueer, agender, and questioning or unsure employees experienced much higher rates of housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity than employees who reported identifying as women or men. Heterosexual employees experienced the lowest overall rates of basic needs insecurity, while those who identified as queer, bisexual, pansexual, and lesbian or gay experienced the highest rates of overall basic needs insecurity.

**TABLE 18.** Disparities in Employee Basic Needs Insecurity by Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

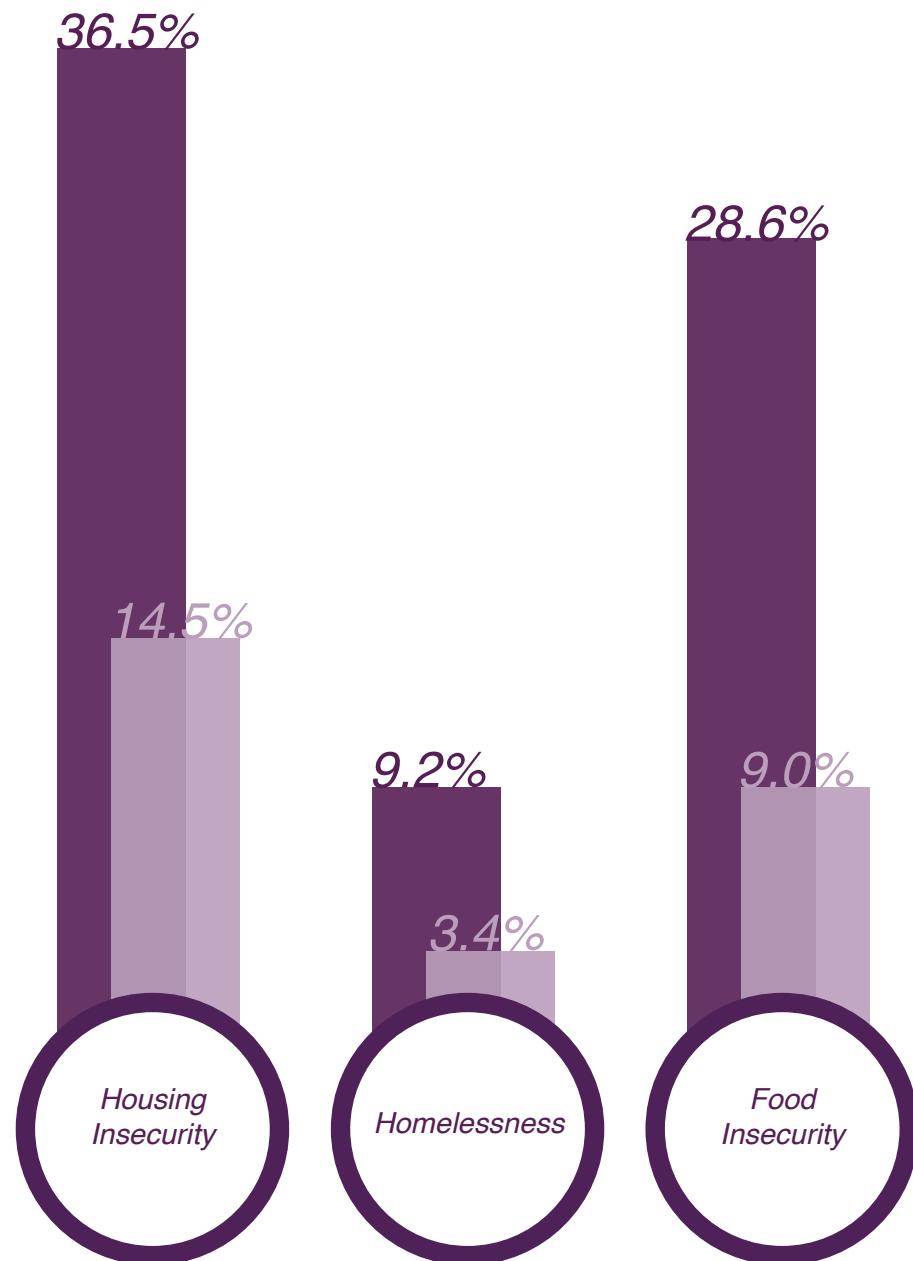
	Number of Employees	Housing Insecurity	Homelessness	Food Insecurity
<b>Gender Identity</b>				
Woman	624	20.2%	5.4%	14.3%
Man	314	22.9%	4.5%	15.9%
Transgender, Non-binary, Genderqueer, Agender, or Questioning/unsure	34	58.8%	17.6%	50.0%
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>				
Asexual	21	19.0%	4.8%	9.5%
Bisexual	75	45.3%	8.0%	30.7%
Gay, Lesbian, or Same Gender Loving	66	25.8%	10.6%	18.2%
Heterosexual	697	18.2%	3.9%	13.1%
Pansexual	23	34.8%	8.7%	26.1%
Queer	46	47.8%	10.9%	37.0%
Questioning or unsure	*	*	*	*

\*Categories with fewer than 10 respondents were excluded to maintain confidentiality, which is a more conservative approach than the Department of Education's policy of excluding cell sizes of less than 6.

**Notes:** Some gender and sexual orientation categories were combined due to a small number of respondents in some categories and our efforts to maintain confidentiality. The Number of Employees column indicates the number of survey respondents to our housing insecurity and homelessness measures. The number of survey respondents for the food insecurity measure may vary slightly but not substantially. Please exercise caution in drawing conclusions from percentages corresponding to categories with a small number of respondents.

## Disability or Medical Condition

Employees with disabilities or major medical conditions reported much higher rates of housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity compared to employees without disabling conditions (see Figure 20 and Table 19). This was true for each disability or medical condition examined in this study, particularly learning disabilities and autism-spectrum disorders.



**FIGURE 20.** Disparities in Employee Basic Needs Insecurity by Disability or Medical Condition

- Employees with at least one disability or medical condition reported
- Employees with no disability or medical condition reported

**TABLE 19.** Disparities in Employee Basic Needs Insecurity by Disability or Medical Condition

	Number of Employees	Housing Insecurity	Homelessness	Food Insecurity
<b>At least one disability or medical condition reported</b>				
Yes	370	36.5%	9.2%	28.6%
No	622	14.5%	3.4%	9.0%
<b>Learning Disability</b>				
Yes	36	52.8%	11.1%	41.7%
No	750	21.5%	5.3%	15.4%
<b>Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)</b>				
Yes	72	54.2%	12.5%	48.6%
No	920	20.2%	5.0%	13.8%
<b>Autism Spectrum Disorder</b>				
Yes	11	45.5%	36.4%	54.4%
No	981	22.4%	5.2%	15.9%
<b>Physical Disability</b>				
Yes	60	33.3%	8.3%	31.7%
No	932	22.0%	5.4%	15.3%
<b>Chronic Illness</b>				
Yes	125	36.0%	7.2%	31.2%
No	867	20.8%	5.3%	14.2%
<b>Mental health / Psychological Disability</b>				
Yes	242	42.6%	11.2%	33.1%
No	750	16.3%	3.7%	10.9%

**Notes:** The Number of Employees column indicates the number of survey respondents to our housing insecurity and homelessness measures. The number of survey respondents for the food insecurity measure may vary slightly but not substantially. Please exercise caution in drawing conclusions from percentages corresponding to categories with a small number of respondents.



*Image Credits:*  
Portland State University

## **Additional Demographic Variables**

Among employees, rates of housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity drastically decreased with age, with the exception of homelessness in ages 55 and above (see Table 20). Similarly, basic needs insecurity rates decreased as level of education increased, with those reporting some college but no degree reporting the highest rates of basic needs insecurities, and those with a graduate degree reporting the lowest rates. Finally, employees who were married or in a domestic partnership reported the lowest rates of basic needs insecurity, while those who were single, dating, or divorced reported higher rates.

**TABLE 20.** Disparities in Employee Basic Needs Insecurity by Additional Demographic Variables

	Number of Employees	Housing Insecurity	Homelessness	Food Insecurity
<b>Age</b>				
21 to 32	208	39.9%	13.0%	35.1%
33 to 43	346	22.8%	4.6%	14.7%
44 to 54	233	14.6%	1.7%	9.0%
55 and above	191	14.1%	3.7%	8.9%
<b>Highest Level of Education</b>				
Some college (but not college degree)	61	42.6%	11.5%	39.3%
Associate's degree	18	33.3%	11.1%	38.9%
Bachelor's degree	245	31.0%	9.8%	23.7%
Graduate degree	662	17.7%	3.3%	11.0%
<b>Relationship Status</b>				
Single	168	36.9%	10.1%	29.2%
In a relationship(s)	152	39.5%	13.2%	29.6%
Married or domestic partnership	613	14.4%	2.3%	9.6%
Divorced	42	31.0%	9.5%	23.8%
Separated	*	*	*	*
Widowed	*	*	*	*

\*Categories with fewer than 10 respondents were excluded to maintain confidentiality, which is a more conservative approach than the Department of Education's policy of excluding cell sizes of less than 6.

**Notes:** The Number of Employees column indicates the number of survey respondents to our housing insecurity and homelessness measures. The number of survey respondents for the food insecurity measure may vary slightly but not substantially. Please exercise caution in drawing conclusions from percentages corresponding to categories with a small number of respondents.

## Employee Life Experiences

We asked employees about a variety of life circumstances and experiences that may put them at a higher risk of facing basic needs insecurity. Employees who were first-generation college students, former foster youth, and veterans all reported higher rates of housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity compared to their colleagues without these same experiences (see Table 21).

**TABLE 21.** Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurity by Employee Life Experiences

	Number of Employees	Housing Insecurity	Homelessness	Food Insecurity
<b>First-Generation College Student</b>				
Yes	232	28.4%	6.9%	22.4%
No	760	20.9%	5.1%	14.5%
<b>Former Foster Youth</b>				
Yes	15	60.0%	20.0%	46.7%
No	977	22.1%	5.3%	15.9%
<b>Veteran</b>				
Yes	28	28.6%	7.2%	21.4%
No	964	22.5%	5.5%	16.2%
<b>Immigrant to the U.S.</b>				
Yes	81	13.6%	0.0%	12.3%
No	639	23.5%	6.0%	16.7%
<b>Parent of a child under 18 who lives with you</b>				
Yes	228	19.7%	2.6%	14.9%
No	764	23.6%	6.4%	16.8%

**Notes:** The Number of Employees column indicates the number of survey respondents to our housing insecurity and homelessness measures. The number of survey respondents for the food insecurity measure may vary slightly but not substantially. Please exercise caution in drawing conclusions from percentages corresponding to categories with a small number of respondents.

## Employee Stories From student to employee

She came to the United States to get an education. Her parents paid the bills.

Then everything changed in an instant.

Her mother called from a refugee camp. Her parents fled Syria with their lives and little else. The international student was now on her own.

"I needed to find a way to stay in school," she said.

She didn't qualify for financial aid, but she used her Arabic language skills to land a job translating at a local hospital. Her roommates helped fill in the gaps with food and support when she might have gone without.

"When I had a good month," she said, "I would bring food, and other times I would [depend on my roommates.]"

She managed a handful of credits a term at Portland Community College. Then she discovered a solution that would ultimately help her earn her bachelor's degree. If she could find a job at PCC, she would get tuition benefits. She applied for everything.

Eventually she was hired as an office assistant. She worked 40 hours a week and went to school full time at night. She earned her associate's degree and

- Staff member
- International student
- Experienced food and housing insecurity

transferred to Portland State University.

In less than a year, she found a job at PSU. She used the tuition assistance to finish her bachelor's degree this spring. It took eight years, but she made it.

She's married now, and despite her degree, she said, all of her paycheck would go to housing without her husband's income.

She is open about her story and happy to tell it. Her willingness to share helped her find support along the way, she said.

"I am one of the lucky ones."



***When I had a good month I would bring food, and other times I would [depend on my roommates.]***

### Crisis Support

*This report covers a difficult topic and many of the personal stories include traumatic experiences including assault and identity-based violence. If you have experienced similar events or are currently struggling with these experiences, know that help is available.*

- Lifeline offers crisis support to all at 800-273-8255 or [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org).

**Notes:** Employee stories come from personal interviews with employees who volunteered to share their experiences. Names have been omitted to protect their privacy.

## Employment and Finances

This section of the report focuses on employment status, use of public assistance, and financial stress among PSU employees.

### Employment Status at PSU

First, employees were asked various questions about their employment status at Portland State. Table 22 illustrates that staff experienced the highest rates of basic needs insecurity, followed by faculty, with administrators reporting the lowest levels of insecurity. Within the faculty category, non-tenure track faculty had greater rates of basic needs insecurity than tenure-track and tenured faculty; and adjunct professors or instructors experienced substantially higher rates of basic needs insecurity than other faculty classifications. Among staff, hourly staff experienced higher rates of housing and food insecurity than salaried staff. Generally, the longer employees had been working at PSU, the lower their rates of basic needs insecurities.

”

***Because I am employed on one-year contracts, I feel a great deal of stress about whether or not I will have a job each year, and I am constantly worried that I won't get a contract and then we will lose our home.***

- PSU employee, 2019

”

***I'm burned out with working 80+ hours during the academic calendar year just so I can make ends meet and not have any benefits because there aren't any full-time positions... During the months I don't teach, I sleep more but don't make enough money to pay bills and rent.***

- PSU employee, 2019

**TABLE 22.** Employment Status and Employee Basic Needs Insecurity

	Number of Employees	Housing Insecurity	Homelessness	Food Insecurity
<b>Full or Part-Time Employee</b>				
Full time	812	20.7%	5.3%	14.4%
Part-time	205	30.7%	6.8%	24.8%
<b>Job Category (respondents could select more than one)</b>				
Staff	539	26.5%	8.0%	21.8%
Faculty	411	19.5%	2.7%	11.3%
Administrator	92	14.1%	5.4%	9.8%
<b>Staff Classification (only asked to staff respondents)</b>				
Salaried	254	20.1%	7.1%	12.2%
Hourly	285	32.3%	8.8%	30.1%
<b>Tenure Status (only asked to faculty respondents)</b>				
Tenured	99	9.1%	2.0%	1.0%
On tenure track, but not tenured	34	14.7%	0.0%	5.9%
Not on tenure track	278	23.7%	3.2%	15.6%
<b>Adjunct Professor/Instructor (only asked to faculty respondents)</b>				
Yes	114	31.6%	2.6%	23.2%
No	297	14.8%	2.7%	6.8%
<b>Years Employed at PSU</b>				
Two years or fewer	259	30.1%	10.8%	22.0%
2.1 to 5 years	249	25.3%	3.6%	18.0%
5.1 to 10 years	239	21.3%	3.8%	18.8%
Over 10 years	270	14.4%	4.1%	8.6%

**Notes:** The Number of Employees column indicates the number of survey respondents to our housing insecurity and homelessness measures. The number of survey respondents for the food insecurity measure may vary slightly but not substantially.

## Income and Other Employment

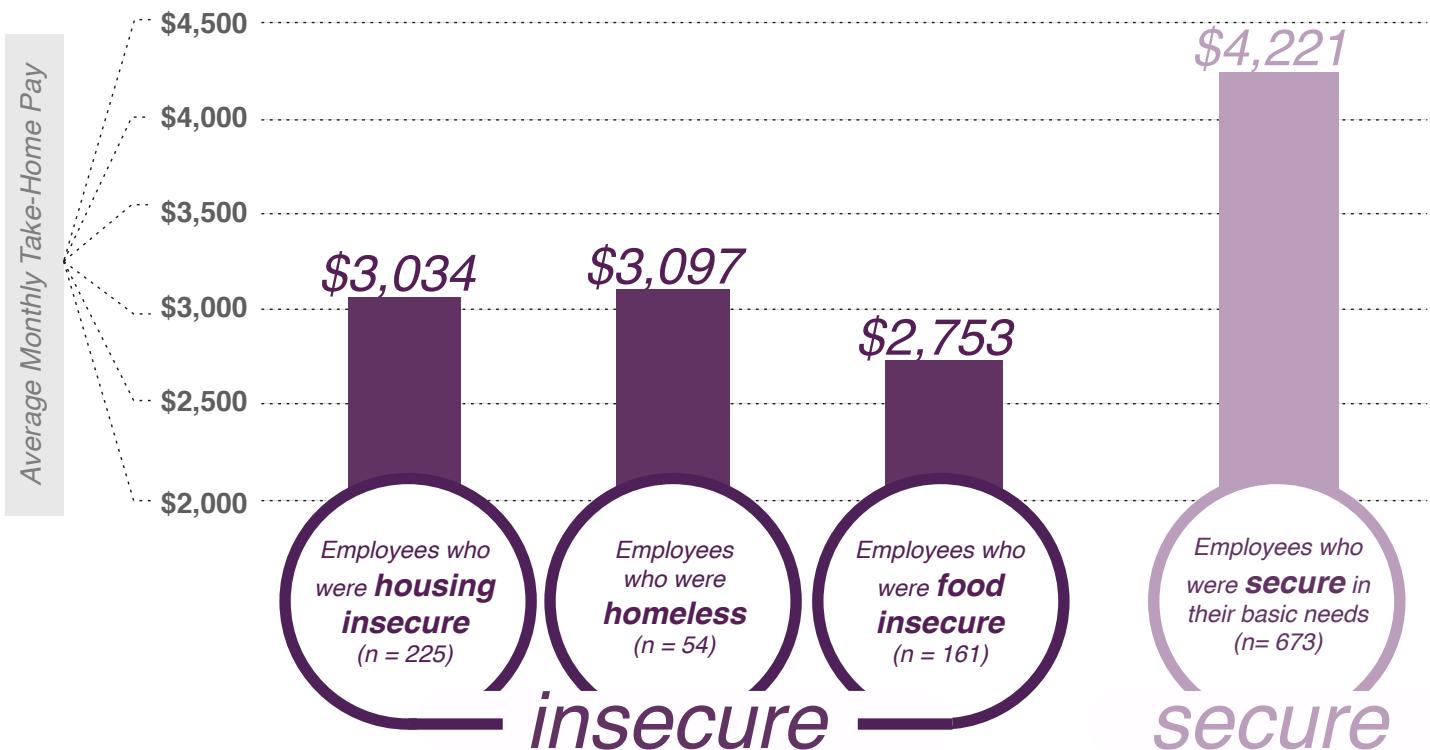
Employees were also asked how many jobs they currently hold both within and outside of PSU, their average number of work hours, and their take-home pay from all of their jobs. Employees reported working an average of 44 hours per week, and their average monthly take-home pay from all jobs was \$3,871. Almost a quarter of employees (24.1%) reported working more than one job, and their rates of basic needs insecurity were higher than employees who worked only one job (see Table 23). Employees who experienced housing insecurity, homelessness, or food insecurity also reported significantly lower monthly pay than employees without basic needs insecurities (see Figure 21).

**TABLE 23.** Working More than One Job and Employee Basic Needs Insecurity

	Number of Employees	Housing Insecurity	Homelessness	Food Insecurity
<b>Working More Than One Job</b>				
Yes	245	32.7%	7.3%	25.1%
No	772	19.6%	5.1%	13.7%

**Notes:** The Number of Employees column indicates the number of survey respondents to our housing insecurity and homelessness measures. The number of survey respondents for the food insecurity measure may vary slightly but not substantially.



**FIGURE 21.** Monthly Take-Home Pay Rates According to Employee Basic Needs Insecurity

**Notes:** The numbers in this figure correspond to employees who answered this specific question.

“

*Most of my paycheck goes towards my one bedroom apartment, and I am often skipping meals and finding other unsustainable ways of cutting costs. I work full time in a position that required a bachelor's degree and preferred a masters degree. The amount of debt that accompanies those two educational qualifications is substantially more than the annual salary of this position. Wages at PSU need to increase to match the qualifications of those filling the positions.*

- PSU employee, 2019

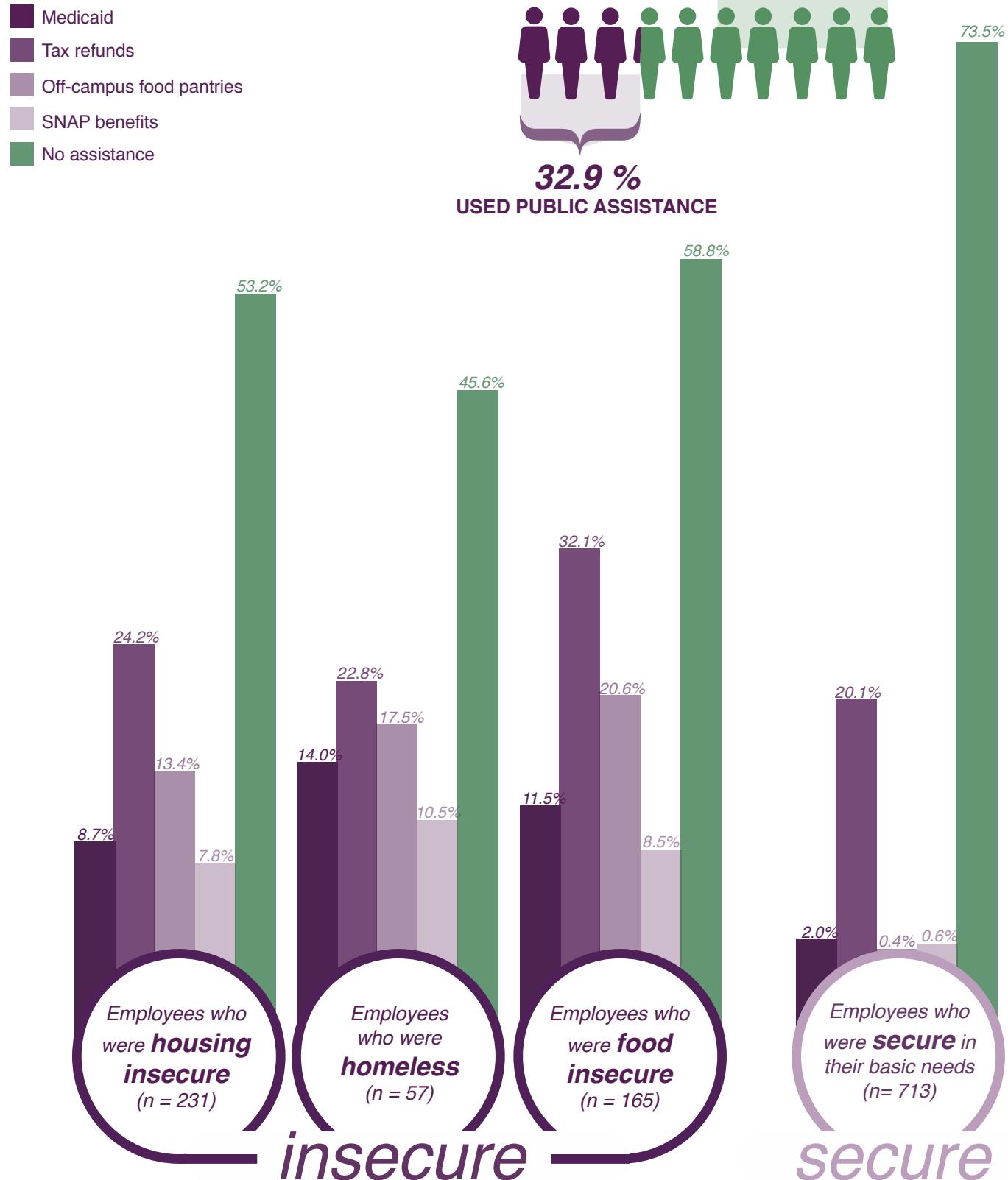
## Use of Assistance Programs

Table 24 shows the different assistance programs employees reported using in the past 12 months, with “secure” employees (i.e., those who did not experience housing insecurity, homelessness, or food insecurity) presented in the final column for comparison. While a small percentage of employees used a variety of public assistance programs, employees who were secure in their basic needs utilized these programs at a much lower rate than employees who experienced housing insecurity, homelessness, or food insecurity in the past year. Medicaid, tax refunds, off-campus food pantries, and SNAP were the most commonly used assistance programs (see Figure 22).

**TABLE 24.** Use of Public Assistance According to Employee Basic Needs Insecurity

	Employees who were <b>housing insecure</b> n = 231	Employees who were <b>homeless</b> n = 57	Employees who were <b>food insecure</b> n = 165	Employees who were <b>secure</b> in their basic needs n = 713
SNAP (Food stamps, EBT)	7.8%	10.5%	8.5%	0.6%
WIC (Nutritional assistance for pregnant women and children)	1.3%	1.8%	1.8%	0.0%
TANF (Public cash assistance; formerly called ADC or ADFC)	0.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
SSI (Supplemental Security Income)	1.3%	1.8%	1.2%	0.3%
SSDI (Social Security Disability Income)	0.4%	3.5%	0.0%	0.1%
Medicaid or public health insurance	8.7%	14.0%	11.5%	2.0%
Off campus food pantry / food bank	13.4%	17.5%	20.6%	0.4%
Child care assistance / subsidy	4.8%	3.5%	4.2%	1.4%
Unemployment compensation / insurance	3.9%	0.0%	3.0%	0.6%
Utility assistance	5.2%	3.5%	6.7%	0.1%
Housing assistance	3.0%	7.0%	4.2%	0.4%
Transportation assistance	5.6%	5.3%	6.1%	2.1%
Tax refunds	24.2%	22.8%	32.1%	20.1%
Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)	6.9%	5.3%	9.1%	1.4%
Veteran's benefit	1.7%	1.8%	1.8%	0.6%
Did not receive formal assistance	53.2%	45.6%	58.8%	73.5%

**FIGURE 22.** Most Commonly Used Types of Public Assistance According to Employee Basic Needs Insecurity

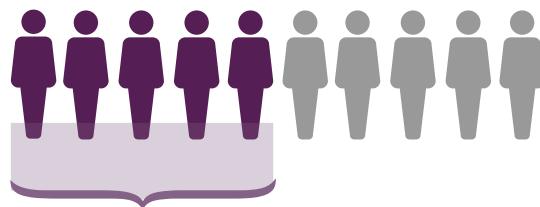


## Financial Stress

Employees were asked to rate their level of agreement with the statement, “*My personal financial situation makes me feel stressed.*” Approximately half of employees indicated that their financial situation made them feel stressed (see Figure 23). Further, 20% of employees in the full sample reported not being able to pay some of their bills (e.g., medical bills, student loans, credit card bills) in the past year, and 20.8% reported having to borrow money from their friends and family to pay their bills.

As Figure 24 shows, employees who experienced housing insecurity, homelessness, and/or food insecurity were more likely to report that their financial situation makes them feel stressed compared to those who were secure in their basic needs.

**FIGURE 23.** Financial Stress Among Employees



**almost 50% of Employees are financially stressed**

“

*I support my husband and myself on one paycheck. We typically run out of money about a week or two into the month, every month. We are unable to save for any unexpected expenses, including retirement, and get by only by taking out a payday loan of \$100-150 (+ interest) most months. It is distressing to have to do so, but there are no other options.*

- PSU employee, 2019

**FIGURE 24.** Financial Stress According to Employee Basic Needs Insecurity



**Notes:** The numbers in this figure correspond to employees who answered this specific question.

## Health Indicators

Given the importance of housing and food security to overall health and well-being, employees were asked a variety of questions about their physical and mental health, including their general levels of stress, how much their health interfered with their daily activities, and how many hours of sleep they averaged each night.

### Stress

We asked employees to report the level of stress they had experienced in the past week on a scale of *0 = no stress* to *10 = extreme stress*. As Figure 25 demonstrates, employees who experienced housing insecurity, homelessness, or food insecurity had higher levels of stress than employees who were secure in their basic needs.

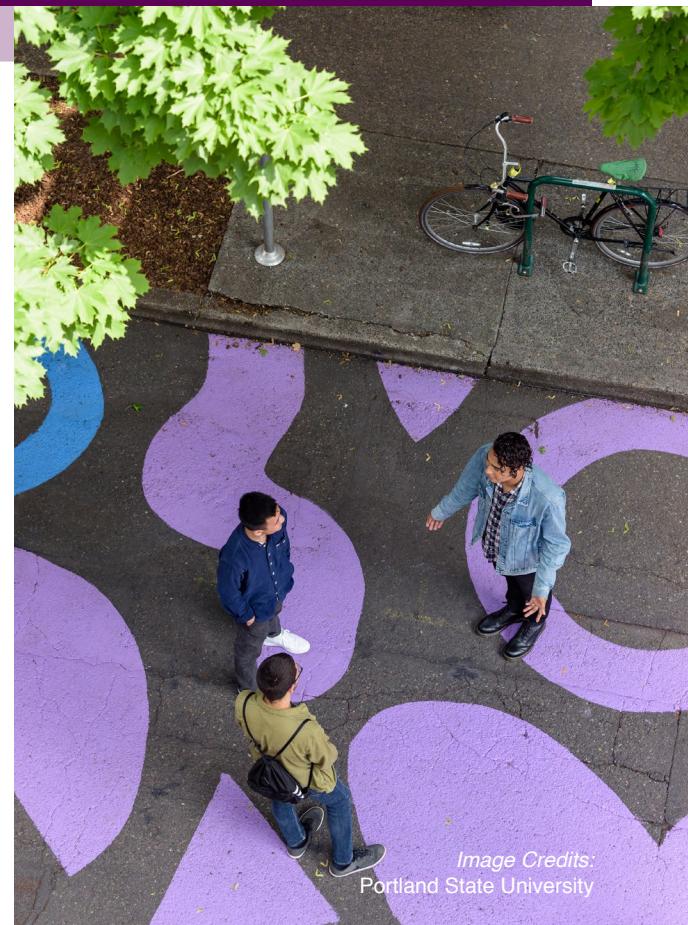
**FIGURE 25.** Level of Stress According to Employee Basic Needs Insecurity



**Note:** The numbers in this figure correspond to employees who answered this specific question.

## Physical and Mental Health Interferences

Employees were asked to indicate the extent to which their physical and mental health had interfered with their daily activities in the past month, from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *extremely*. Employees who reported *moderately, quite a bit, or extremely* were categorized as having physical and/or mental health interferences. Employees who experienced housing insecurity, homelessness, or food insecurity reported significantly higher rates of physical and mental health interferences compared to those who were secure in their basic needs (see Figure 26).



**FIGURE 26.** Health Interferences According to Employee Basic Needs Insecurity

- Physical Health Interference
- Mental Health Interference

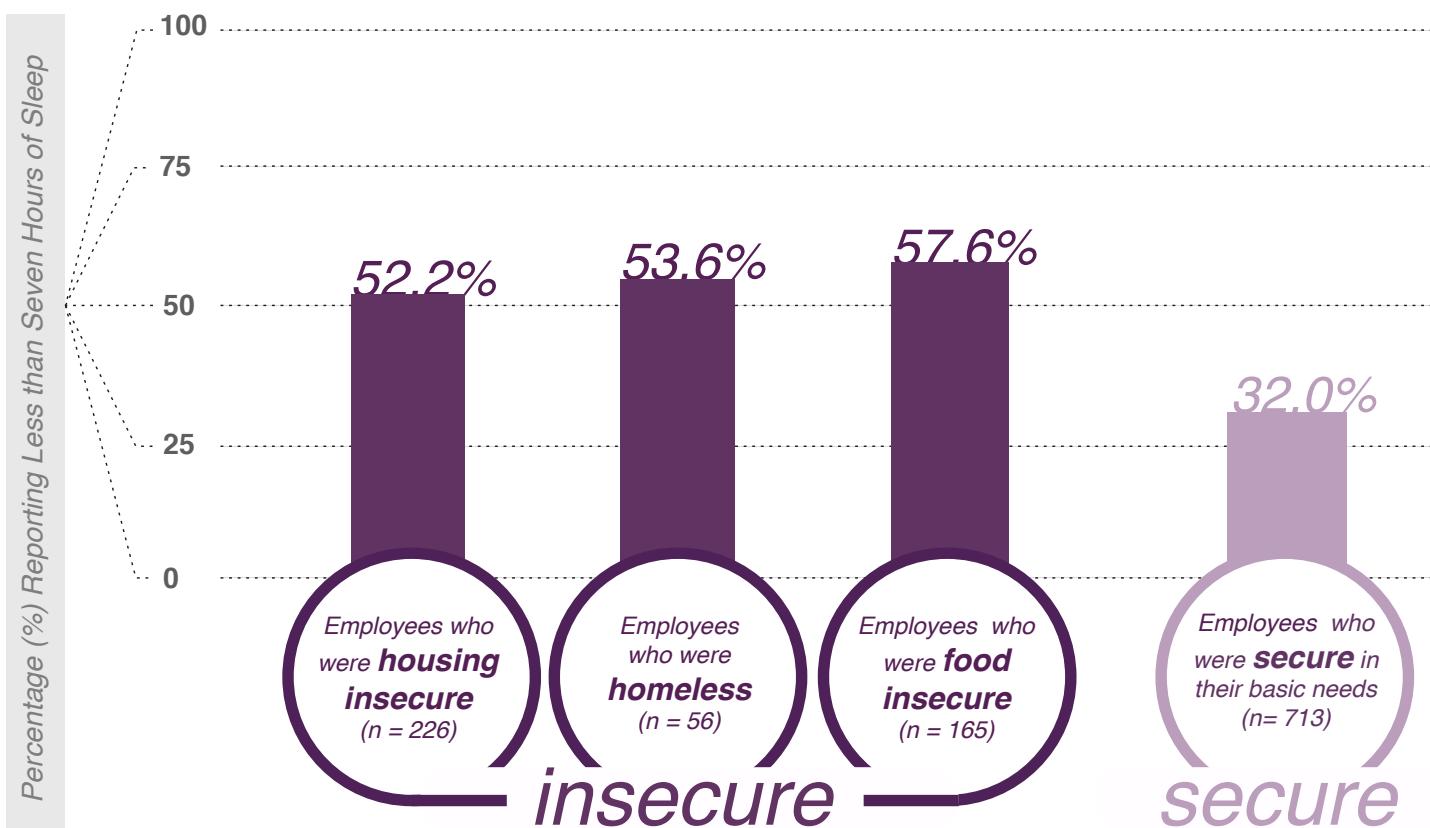


Note: The numbers in this figure correspond to employees who answered this specific question.

## Sleep

Finally, we asked employees to report how much sleep they get each night. In the full sample of employees, 63.2% reported that they sleep seven or more hours per night, while 37% reported sleeping fewer than seven hours per night. A significantly larger percentage of employees reported sleeping fewer than seven hours per night if they experienced housing insecurity, homelessness, or food insecurity in the past year compared to employees who were secure in their basic needs (see Figure 27). This is in line with other research demonstrating the challenges people experiencing homelessness have obtaining a sufficient amount of quality sleep (Taylor et al., 2019). It also serves as an additional risk factor for reduced physical and mental health, as well as limitations in other life domains.

**FIGURE 27.** Percentage of Employees Who Slept Fewer than Seven Hours Per Night According to Basic Needs Insecurity



**Note:** The numbers in this figure correspond to employees who answered this specific question.

## Social Connectedness and Belonging

Social connectedness and belonging can be challenging for employees who struggle with basic needs insecurity. We assessed two types of social connectedness in this study.

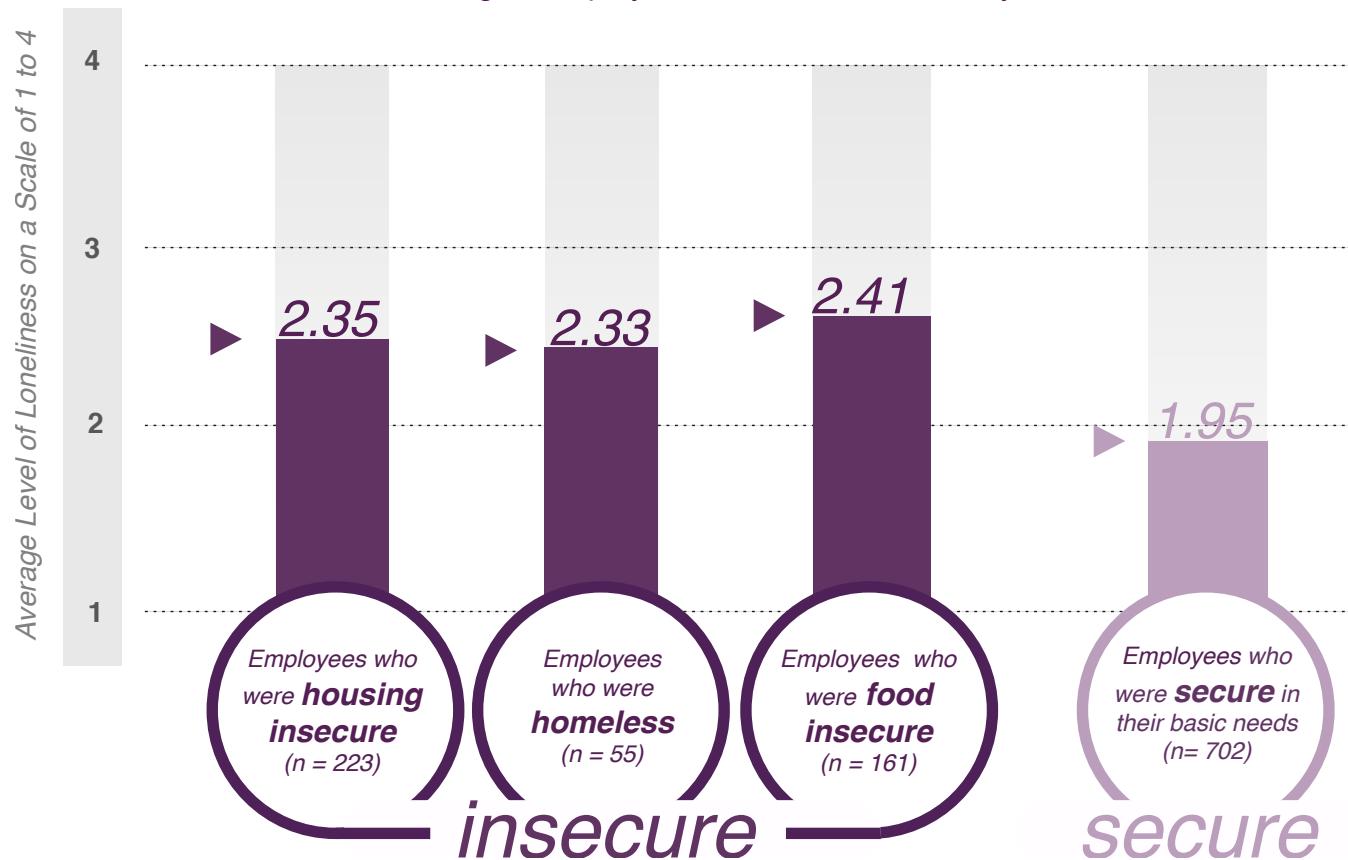
### Loneliness

First, we used a four-item version of the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Ferguson, 1978) to measure rates of loneliness and isolation among employees. Although rates of loneliness were moderate across the sample, averaging 2.05 on a scale of 1 to 4, employees experiencing housing insecurity, homelessness, or food insecurity reported higher levels of loneliness than employees who were secure in their basic needs (see Figure 28). Further, upwards of 65% of employees with basic needs insecurities reported feeling *sometimes* or *always* isolated from others (see Figure 29), compared to 40% of employees who were secure in their needs.

**FIGURE 29.** Rates of Isolation Among Employees with Basic Needs Insecurity



**FIGURE 28.** Loneliness According to Employee Basic Needs Insecurity



**Note:** The numbers in this figure correspond to employees who answered this specific question.



*Image Credits:*  
Portland State University

## Campus Sense of Community

We also asked employees how strong of a sense of community they feel with others at Portland State University using one item from the Brief Sense of Community Index (Long & Perkins, 2003). Although employees who were secure in their needs were a bit more likely than others to report a strong sense of community, overall rates of sense of community were moderate and did not differ substantially depending on basic needs insecurity (see Table 25).

**TABLE 25.** Campus Sense of Community  
According to Employee Basic Needs Insecurity

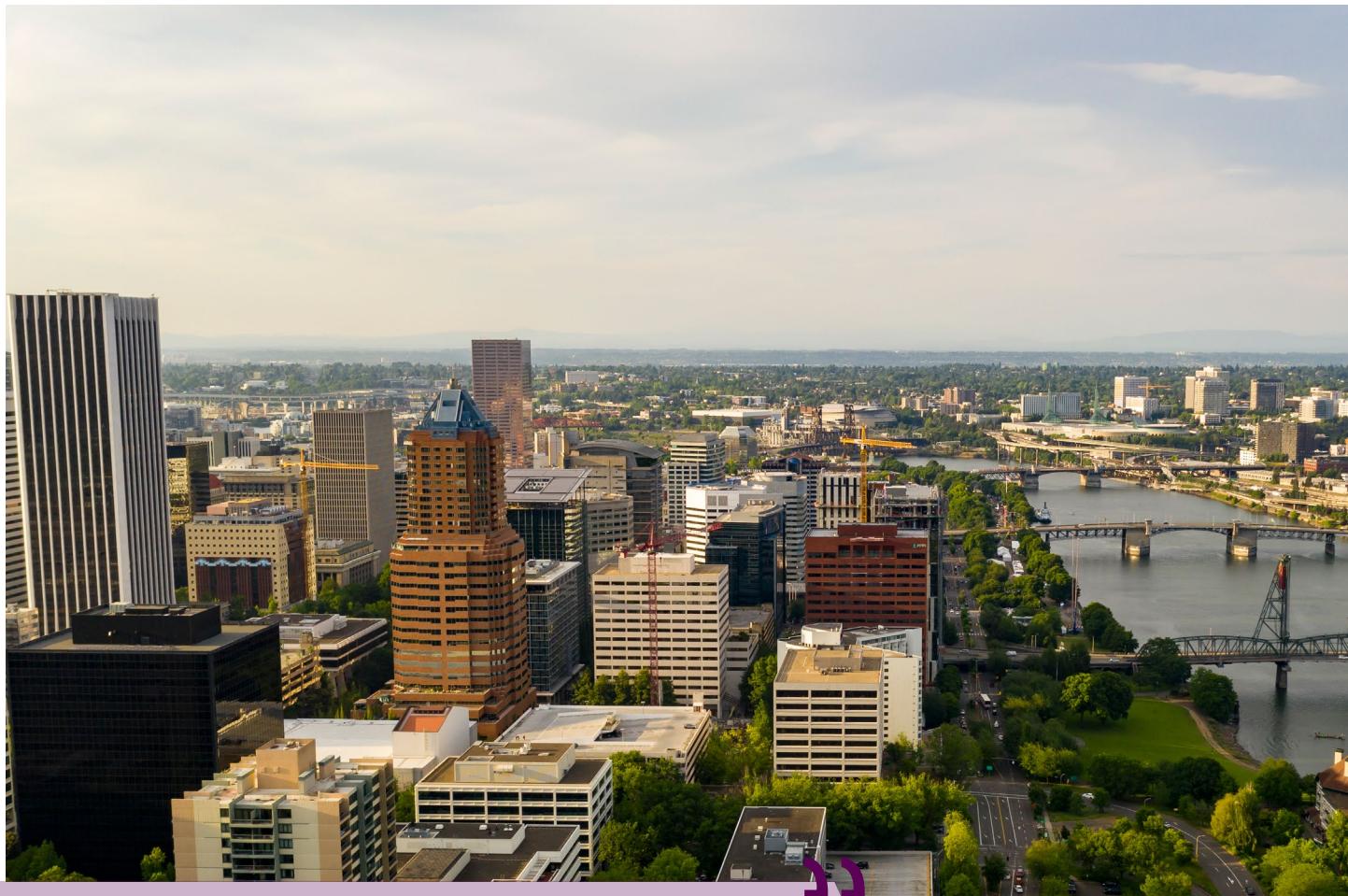
	<i>insecure</i>	<i>secure</i>		
	Employees who were <b>housing insecure</b> <i>n</i> = 224	Employees who were <b>homeless</b> <i>n</i> = 55	Employees who were <b>food insecure</b> <i>n</i> = 162	Employees who were <b>secure</b> in their basic needs <i>n</i> = 699
Very little sense of community	25.9%	21.8%	34.6%	16.1%
Something in between	62.9%	63.6%	56.8	62.7%
Strong sense of community	11.2%	14.5%	8.6%	19.2%

**Note:** The numbers in this table correspond to employees who answered this specific question.

## Employee Explanations for Basic Needs Insecurity

The final question of the survey provided space for respondents to write anything else they wanted to share with us concerning their housing and food needs, to which 225 employees submitted responses. Similar to students, employees' primary concerns were financial, with many employees indicating that they struggle with how to prioritize their limited budgets given the many expenses that they have.

Nearly 100 employees' responses reflected concerns with the discrepancy between the rising cost of living and their limited incomes. Many employees expressed that their income from PSU alone is not enough to support them and their families throughout the year. To make ends meet, PSU employees described working extra jobs; having to rely on their significant other's income to support the family; using savings or credit cards; receiving help from extended family; or relying on assistance programs.



*The increasing cost of housing and food has meant that we have to stretch our budget to continue to afford healthy meals (especially vegetables). I regularly experience anxiety about future ability to afford all of our needs.*

- PSU employee 2019

*Image Credits:*

Portland State University

## Income and Employment Structures

The primary concerns that most employees described in their comments about housing and food insecurity related to their income and employment structures. Employees expressed that their income does not match the minimum cost of living in Portland, and that they have to make extra sacrifices or rely on others in order to afford their living expenses. This income-to-cost of living discrepancy places mental and emotional strain on employees, with employees describing the stress, demoralization, and shame that comes with such financial strain and with working at a university but still being unable to make ends meet.

“

*It's unreasonable that every year, my step increases will basically just stay on par with the minimum wage increases in Portland. It's demoralizing. Living in the city is very expensive, and my pay should reflect that.*

- PSU employee, 2019

***Everything about the condition of adjuncts at PSU makes our health, our sense of community, our stress levels and our lives extremely difficult and precarious.***

- PSU employee, 2019

”

***I am able to meet my basic needs by drawing down savings that I built in my previous career. This is not sustainable over the long-term, and the need for a more secure income will eventually make it impossible for me to continue teaching at PSU. It is not possible to live securely on what adjunct instructors are paid at this institution without an additional source of income or outside savings.***

- PSU employee, 2019

”

***The 9 month salary structure makes it difficult for our family of four. We can not afford our monthly expenses if we shift to the 12-month paycheck, and in particular we can't afford to go through September without pay, as enrolling in this program requires a delay in payment receipt after a summer without pay. Making it through summer expenses requires that we work all year to save every dollar that we can... We are constantly aware, particularly in summer, that unplanned expenses... could be enough to make us miss a bill payment... We recognize that we are very privileged and at the same time, recognize that we are not financially secure.***

- PSU employee, 2019

## Food and Housing Costs

Many employees indicated that the cost of food in Portland is a burden, and they worry about how they will feed their families. Some employees have utilized food pantries to feed their children or families, while others indicated that they use credit cards or have to compromise the quality of their food in order to afford food at all.

“

*I feel that I can house and feed my family, however, I feel that I am going into high debt to do so and may end up in bankruptcy eventually or lose my home. I don't make enough to keep up with the cost of living.*

- PSU employee, 2019

”

*I don't fall into the traditional homeless/ verge-of-homeless group, but with the way housing costs have risen in Portland, I feel that if I had to move out of my current income-restricted apartment and live in a market-rate one, I would always be stressing about whether or not the next month would be the one to throw me either further into debt or find me homeless.*

- PSU employee, 2019

“

*Most of my meals have to cost between \$1 to \$2 in order to stay in my monthly budget. I'm not able to eat as many healthy, balanced meals as I should, and many days, I have to choose between eating something nutritious or eating something with enough calories.*

- PSU employee, 2019

Similar to students, employees described living farther from campus in order to afford housing. However, living farther away has had negative impacts on the health and well-being of some of the employees who have had to make this difficult financial choice.

”

*My housing is an hour commute from PSU, each way, because I cannot afford to live any closer. The transportation situation in town is horrible as my housing is less than 10 miles away but takes me so long to get back and forth. After a long day of work, sitting in traffic for an hour is the worst way to end a day and negatively impacts the quality of time I get to spend with my family in the evenings.*

- PSU employee, 2019

## Employee Stories Not who you expect

She slipped into homelessness without realizing it was happening.

Her landlord needed the house back, so she went to stay with her friend's parents at the beginning of her freshman year. After a few weeks, she hopped to another set of friend's parents.

She never stayed longer than a month, and she always helped out around the house so she wouldn't wear out her welcome before she had somewhere else to go.

Her work had a food pantry where she could grab lunch. She also signed up for volunteer gigs that included food. No one would have ever guessed that she was homeless.

"I was always clean. I always had my homework done. I always looked like I had everything together," she said.

The problem was that she could not afford rent. She also didn't qualify for most units, which required earning twice the monthly payment. Places that she could afford were an hour and a half away, which meant traveling three hours per day to get to class.



***I was convinced I was going to be able to forge my own path... and that crashed and burned so hard.***

- *Portland State University graduate and employee*
  - *Experienced homelessness for 8 months*
  - *Hopes to buy first home in three to five years*

"I was convinced I was going to be able to forge my own path," she said, "and that crashed and burned so hard."

Her parents never had a lot of money, she said, and she knew she was on her own for college. By May of her freshman year, she was out of options.

She called her mom as her last resort. She asked if she could come home. Without hesitating, her mom informed her dad that their daughter was moving back in. Her mom told her that nobody has ever seen her as a failure.

"I was worried that somehow they would think that I didn't try every option," she said.

Now she pays rent and helps her parents with expenses. She knows that she's lucky. She earned her bachelor's degree in film studies and her masters in technical theater. She works part-time at Portland State University and a local theater company.

As far as homelessness, she said, it's not always who you expect to see.

"There is another story to homelessness and housing insecurity."

### Crisis Support

*This report covers a difficult topic and many of the personal stories include traumatic experiences including assault and identity-based violence. If you have experienced similar events or are currently struggling with these experiences, know that help is available.*

- Lifeline offers crisis support to all at 800-273-8255 or [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org).

**Notes:** Employee stories come from personal interviews with employees who volunteered to share their experiences. Names have been omitted to protect their privacy.

---

# **COVID-19 Results**

---

*Basic Needs Insecurity During the Pandemic*

# COVID-19 Results

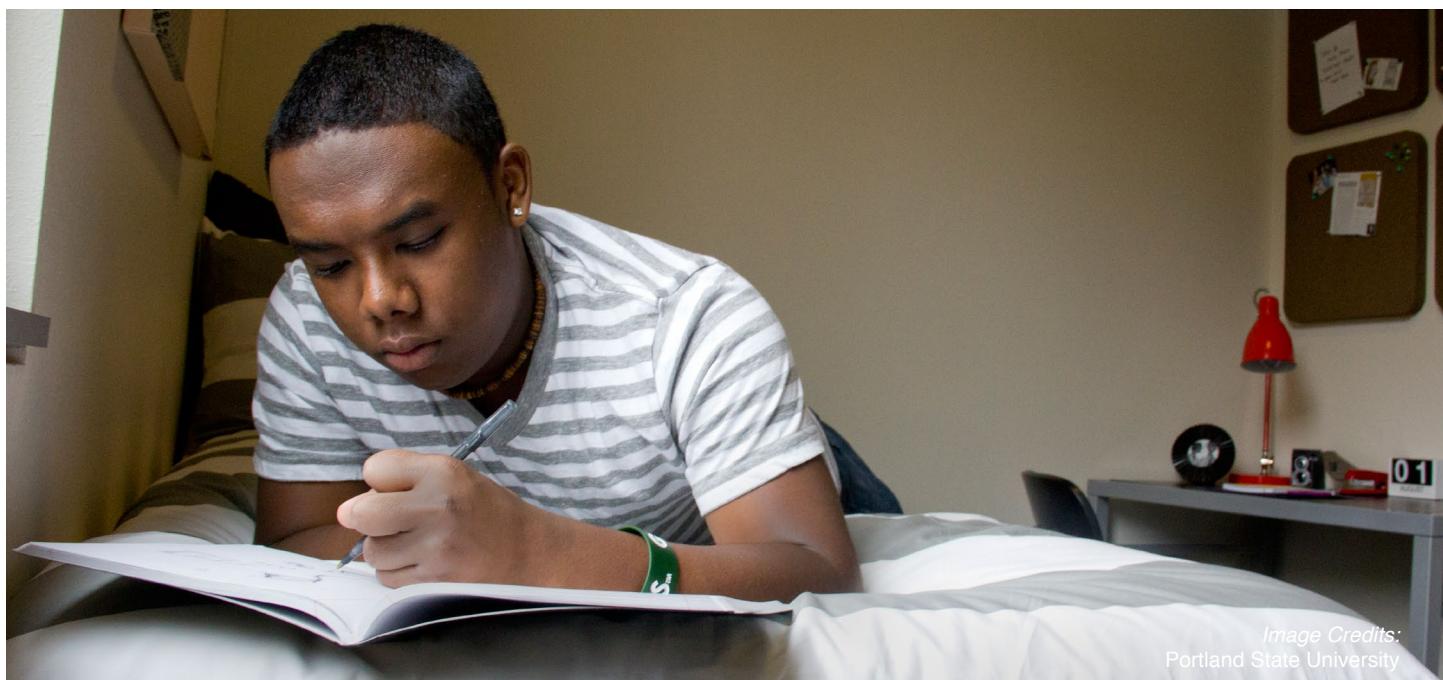
## Basic Needs Insecurity During the Pandemic

Due to the unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and its widespread impacts, we decided to conduct a follow-up survey designed to understand how the pandemic impacted students' basic needs security, academic performance, finances, and various aspects of their health and well-being. In early July 2020, an email invitation was sent to all 641 students who indicated in the original survey that they were willing to be contacted for follow-up research. We sent reminders at the same time each week for the following three weeks. Interested participants clicked the link provided in the email, which sent them to a Qualtrics survey with a full explanation of the study, informed consent, and links to resource pages about PSU-specific COVID resources and information about housing and health services in Portland. After completing the survey, participants had the option to enter a drawing for one of five \$50 Visa gift cards.

In total, 166 students (26% of those invited) completed the survey (see Appendix C for full sample description). It is important to acknowledge that this small subsample (representing just under 5% of the sample we surveyed in Fall 2019) is not necessarily representative of the broader Portland State community. These

are students who reported either lifetime or current experiences with homelessness, housing insecurity, and/or food insecurity in the previous survey. Thus, they represent some of the most vulnerable students, and we expected higher rates of basic needs insecurity among this group compared to the broader, more representative sample we surveyed in the fall. However, they also represent some of the most vital perspectives. If these students experienced housing and food insecurity pre-pandemic, we would expect them to experience a variety of educational, economic, social, and health challenges much more acutely as a result of the pandemic.

Given the very specific nature of this more vulnerable subsample, and also differences in how we measured and report variables pertaining to housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity (explained in more detail below), we discourage comparisons to the previous student results section, and to the broader Portland State community. This section is intended to serve as a snapshot of life during the pandemic for those students who were most vulnerable to its devastating effects, and who will likely need the most support in the months and years to come.



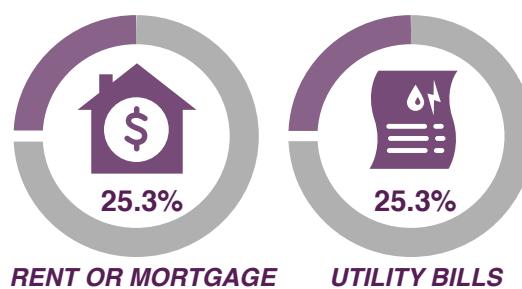
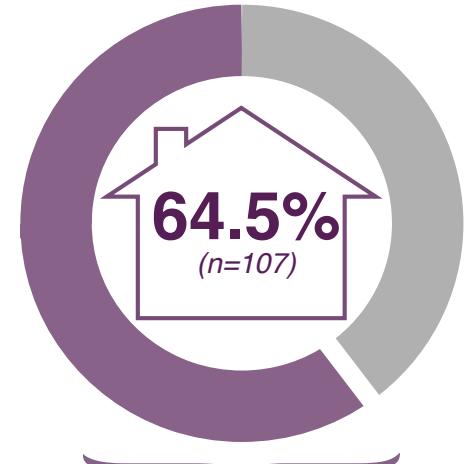
*Image Credits:*  
Portland State University

## Student Housing Insecurity During the Pandemic

Student housing insecurity was assessed with most of the same items reported in previous sections of the report: eight items developed by the Hope Center asking about students' ability to pay rent and utilities, moving in with others because of financial difficulties, and leaving housing because they feel unsafe (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019), as well as three items from previous studies of campus basic needs insecurity (e.g., California State University, NC State University) asking about evictions and being forced to leave housing. Students were asked to indicate whether they had experienced any of these housing insecurity indicators since March 2020 (the beginning of the pandemic in Oregon).

Among the students who completed this follow-up survey, 64.5% ( $n = 107$ ) reported experiencing at least one form of housing insecurity since March 2020. The most commonly reported forms of housing insecurity were not paying or underpaying rent or mortgage (25.3%) as well as not paying the full amount of a utility bill (25.3%).

**FIGURE 30.** Students Who Experienced Housing Insecurity Since March 2020



**TABLE 26.** Housing Insecurity Among Students Since March 2020

Housing Insecurity Indicators	Percentage Experiencing
Experienced at least one form of housing insecurity	64.5%
Did not pay or underpaid your rent or mortgage	25.3%
Did not pay the full amount of a gas, oil, water, or electricity bill	25.3%
Had an account default or go into collections	15.7%
Moved in with another person because of financial problems	15.7%
Experienced a rent or mortgage increase that made it difficult to pay	13.9%
Left the place you were staying at because you felt unsafe	12.7%
Joined someone else's housing without telling the landlord	6.0%
Lived with others beyond the expected capacity of the house or apartment	5.4%
Got thrown out of the place you were staying at by someone else in the household	2.4%
Got evicted from your home	2.4%
Received a summons to appear in housing court	0.6%

$n = 166$

In this follow-up survey, students were also asked to indicate whether they had to leave their housing during the pandemic due to various circumstances (see Table 27). Almost a third of students (32.5%; n = 54) had to leave their housing during the pandemic. The most common reason was not being able to pay rent, followed by feeling unsafe in housing.

**TABLE 27.** Reasons Students had to Leave their Housing During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Reasons for Leaving Housing	Percentage of those who had to leave housing
Inability to pay rent	64.8%
Feeling unsafe	38.9%
Problems with roommates	13%
Illness (self)	13%
Illness (someone you lived with)	7.4%
Illness (someone else you know who you had to help care for)	7.4%
Other reasons	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They were encouraged to leave student housing due to health and safety concerns</li> <li>• Owner sold the house they were renting</li> <li>• Lack of access to resources due to the location</li> <li>• Desire to be closer to family during the crisis</li> </ul>	31.5%

n = 166

“

*I moved to my parent's home. My sister and her son also moved here. It's a stressful environment, and it has made it hard to focus or get uninterrupted time.*

- PSU student, 2020

## Student Homelessness During the Pandemic

In order to assess student homelessness during the pandemic, we asked students to report the places they had stayed overnight in the 30 days prior to completing the survey using the measure developed by Crutchfield & Maguire (2017), which is described in more detail in previous sections of this report.

Over 20% of students in this sample ( $n = 33$ ) indicated experiencing some form of homelessness in the past 30 days.

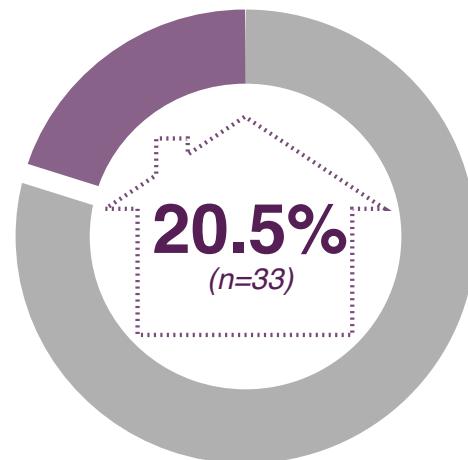
The most commonly experienced form of homelessness was staying temporarily with a relative or friend, or “couch surfing;” and staying in a closed area or space not meant for human habitation, such as an abandoned building, car, truck, or tent.

**TABLE 28.** Homelessness Among Students in the Past 30 Days

Locations Stayed Overnight (students were asked to select all that apply):	Percentage Experiencing
Stayed at any of the following locations	20.5%
Temporarily staying with a relative, friend, or couch surfing until I find other housing	12.7%
In a closed area/space with a roof not meant for human habitation such as an abandoned building, car or truck, van, RV, camper, encampment or tent, or unconverted garage, attic, or basement	10.0%
Temporarily at a hotel or motel without a permanent home to return to (not on vacation or business travel)	3.0%
An outdoor location such as street, sidewalk, or alley, bus or train stop, campground or woods, park, bench, or riverbed, under bridge or overpass	4.8%
At a shelter	1.8%
In transitional housing or independent living program	1.2%
At a group home such as a halfway house or residential program for mental health or substance abuse	0%
At a treatment center (such as detox, hospital, etc.)	1.2%

$n = 166$

**FIGURE 31.** Students Who Experienced Homelessness in the Past 30 Days



*I had to live on the street temporarily before finding a temporary home. I'm currently temporarily living with my friend.*

- PSU student, 2020



## Impact of the Pandemic on Housing Insecurity and Homelessness

Two open-ended questions asked students to describe the impact of the pandemic on their housing situations, and responses indicate that the pandemic has amplified students' difficulties with housing instability and homelessness. In particular, changes in students' financial situations brought on by the pandemic (e.g., job loss, not being able to find a job, unexpected expenses) have made them concerned about not being able to afford their rent, being behind on rent payments, and being unsure how they will pay back the money they owe.

*I'm draining every bit of savings I had in order to remain housed and keep my bills paid each month. It will run out eventually, and then I don't know what I'll do.*

- PSU student, 2020

*I've fallen behind nearly five months in rent... I will not be able to pay everything back once the [rent] moratorium ends in September.*

- PSU student, 2020

*Homeless prior to the pandemic but had to pass on a room when it was offered because my savings had dwindled too much to feel I could pay the second month's rent. I could have been off the damn street. Still hurts to think about.*

- PSU student, 2020

Further, many students described having to leave their housing and move in with others (such as family or friends) because they could no longer afford their rent. Some students also described how they do not feel safe in their current housing because of the pandemic and ongoing protests, and for some students this was a reason to leave their housing.

“

*COVID-19 caused me to lose my main source of income, so I had to vacate my apartment because I could no longer afford it. I am currently living with my mom since that's the only housing I can afford.*

- PSU student, 2020

”

*Left the dorms because I couldn't afford to stay, then couldn't go back home, so I had to take the train and live with a friend in California.*

- PSU student, 2020

“

*I felt unsafe staying in my apartment in downtown Portland because of possible exposure and the nightly protesting. I support the protestors but it has been difficult hearing flash bangs, helicopters wizzing, and having tear gas come into the apartment windows. It was also very stressful for our pets. We are now staying with relatives two hours away from Portland, still in Oregon.*

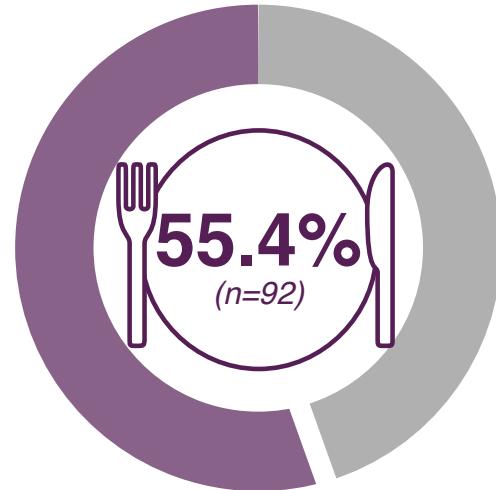
- PSU student, 2020

## Student Food Insecurity During the Pandemic

To examine food insecurity among students during the pandemic, we used the six-item validated measure of food insecurity from the U.S. Department of Agriculture instead of the 18-item measure. Students were asked to indicate whether they had experienced a variety of situations indicating food insecurity in the 30 days prior to completing the survey (see Table 29).

In total, 55.4% of respondents ( $n = 92$ ) experienced food insecurity in the past 30 days.

The most commonly reported challenges were not being able to afford to eat balanced meals and not having enough money to buy more food when what students had ran out. Further, 29.5% of respondents indicated that they could not afford their groceries during the pandemic.



**FIGURE 32.** Students Who Experienced Food Insecurity in the Past 30 Days

**TABLE 29.** Food Insecurity Among Students in the Past 30 Days

Food Insecurity Statements	Percentage Experiencing
I couldn't afford to eat balanced meals	55.4%
The food that I bought just didn't last, and I didn't have enough money to get more	51.2%
I cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food	45.8%
I cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food (3 or more times in the last 30 days)	41.6%
I ate less than I felt I should because there wasn't enough money for food	44.0%
I was hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food	32.5%

$n = 166$



## Impact of the Pandemic on Food Insecurity

One open-ended question asked students to describe the impact of the pandemic on their access to food. Students noted having to cut back on their food, compromise the quality of their food, and make difficult budgetary decisions to be able to afford food. Students also described that they could no longer get to grocery stores or were afraid to shop at grocery stores due to the pandemic. They also could not afford other options for accessing food such as curbside pickup or delivery.

***We've started going grocery shopping much less frequently because of not wanting to be exposed to the virus. This makes it difficult to keep healthier options like fresh vegetables in the house. We've also started eating much cheaper foods in order to stretch our food budget further.***

- PSU student, 2020

“

***I can only shop at Walmart because that is the only place that SNAP allows you to get curbside pick up. I cannot go inside stores due to my high risk status, and Walmart doesn't always have everything I need/like for food.***

- PSU student, 2020

Some students were able to reach out to family and friends for support with food, while others relied on public assistance programs such as SNAP and WIC. Some students described relying on food banks or free food options in order to meet their food needs during the pandemic, while others reported not being able to access resources for food that they relied on before the pandemic.

“

*I borrowed heavily from my roommate, parents, and credit cards to afford food.*

- PSU student, 2020

”

*I have been living off of food stamps and also free food from local food pantries. I have been going to the PSU food pantry once per week... and also going to another local food bank... I am so grateful to have access to these food resources, but also it is challenging because the selection isn't always great, and it makes it more difficult for my family to eat healthy.*

- PSU student, 2020

“

*I used to rely on the PSU food pantry for most of my calories, but now that I am unable to make it to campus, I find myself going to bed without eating most of the time or not getting enough calories on most days.*

- PSU student, 2020

## Racial Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurity Amplified by COVID

“

***Black Americans have a higher likelihood to die because of systemic racism in healthcare. We are scared. It was bad enough dealing with racism prior to Rona.***

- PSU student, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). Black and Latino/a/x Americans are twice as likely to contract and die from COVID-19 compared to White people (Oppel et al., 2020). Native Americans make up over half of COVID-19 cases in New Mexico, and the Navajo Nation has the highest infection rate per capita in the United States (Cheetham, 2020). Asians and Asian Americans have been targets of physical and verbal attacks and hate crimes since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

Along with the greater likelihood of becoming seriously ill or dying from COVID-19, BIPOC students, particularly Black students, are experiencing high levels of racial trauma in the wake of multiple high-profile cases of anti-Black violence and racism—all on top of the stress of social distancing and remote learning (Quirk, 2020). Therefore, it was important for us to examine whether there were racial/ethnic disparities in the pandemic's impact on basic needs insecurity among the students we surveyed.

Overwhelmingly, BIPOC students experienced higher rates of basic needs insecurity compared to White students (see Table 30). This is in line with recent research conducted by the Hope Center, that found stark racial disparities in basic needs insecurity during the pandemic, with Black and Indigenous students reporting the highest rates (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2020).

In addition to higher levels of housing insecurity and food insecurity, their rates of homelessness during the pandemic were over twice as high as those of White students (30.6% compared to 13.2%). They were also nearly two times as likely to have to leave their housing during the pandemic (see Figure 33). Almost 20% of BIPOC students reported having to leave their housing because they felt unsafe, compared to 8% of White students.

”

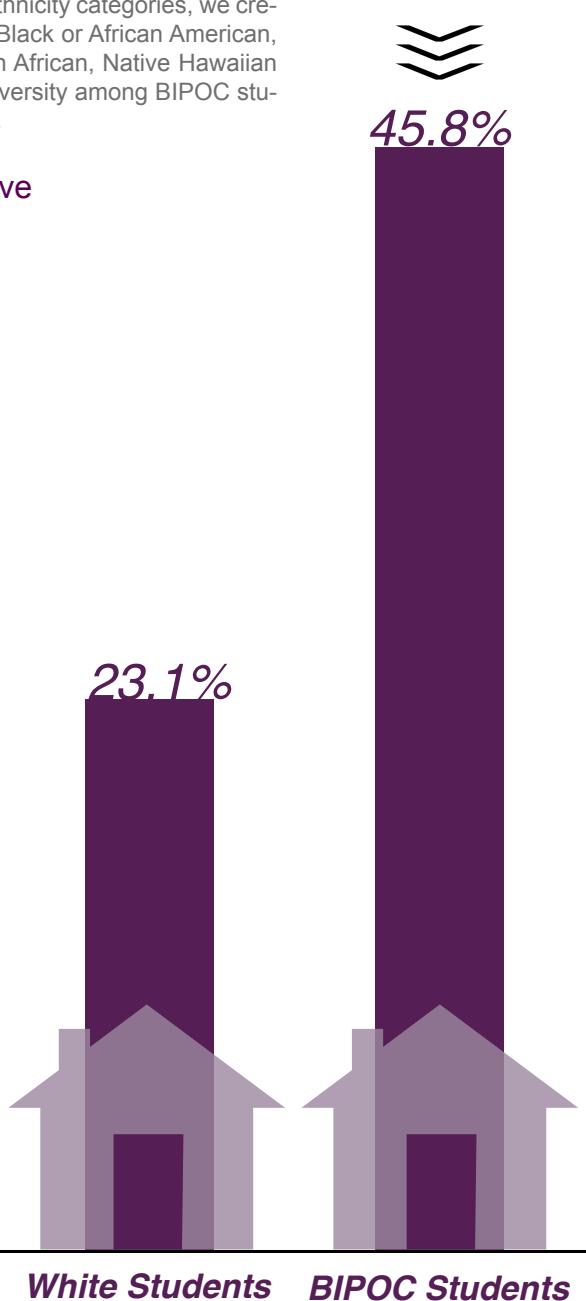
***The fear of the virus, and seeing first hand how it has exacerbated existing health disparities. The only folks I've known that have had the virus are people of color.***

- PSU student, 2020

**TABLE 30.** Racial Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurity During the Pandemic

	Number of Students	Housing Insecurity	Homelessness	Food Insecurity	Had to Leave Housing During the Pandemic
<b>Race</b>					
BIPOC students	72	70.8%	30.6%	61.1%	45.8%
White students	91	59.3%	13.2%	49.5%	23.1%

**Note:** Due to small numbers of respondents in many of the individual race and ethnicity categories, we created a BIPOC category for all students who identified their race or ethnicity as Black or African American, Native American, Latino/a/x/, Asian or Asian American, Middle Eastern or North African, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and Multiracial. We recognize that there is a great deal of diversity among BIPOC students, and their experiences with basic needs insecurity may vary considerably.

**FIGURE 33.** Racial Disparities in Students Who Had to Leave Housing During the Pandemic

## Academic Challenges During the Pandemic

Students were asked to indicate how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted their academic progress, performance, and plans. Students who experienced housing insecurity, homelessness, or food insecurity reported higher rates of difficulties with the academic changes brought on by the pandemic compared to their peers who were secure in their basic needs (Table 31). Some of the most commonly reported challenges included difficulty accessing technology needed for online classes, staying focused, and making expected progress. Students with basic needs insecurities also reported more disruptions to their academic plans due to the pandemic (Table 32).

**TABLE 31.** Academic Difficulties Brought on by the Pandemic According to Basic Needs Insecurity

	insecure	secure		
	Students who were <b>housing insecure</b> <i>n</i> = 107	Students who were <b>homeless</b> <i>n</i> = 33	Students who were <b>food insecure</b> <i>n</i> = 92	Students who were <b>secure</b> in their basic needs <i>n</i> = 34
Difficulty staying focused due to changes in how classes were structured	82.2%	79.4%	78.3%	61.8%
Difficulty staying in and making expected progress in the classes I was enrolled in for the spring 2020 term	50.5%	44.1%	53.3%	26.5%
Difficulty accessing class or learning materials	46.7%	44.1%	46.7%	11.8%
Difficulty accessing technology that is needed for continuing classes	38.3%	47.1%	34.8%	5.9%
Difficulty accessing online learning systems for classes (e.g., D2L)	23.4%	26.5%	20.7%	5.9%

**TABLE 32.** Impact of the Pandemic on Academic Plans According to Basic Needs Insecurity

	insecure	secure		
	Students who were <b>housing insecure</b> <i>n</i> = 107	Students who were <b>homeless</b> <i>n</i> = 33	Students who were <b>food insecure</b> <i>n</i> = 92	Students who were <b>secure</b> in their basic needs <i>n</i> = 34
I had to withdraw from classes at PSU	25.2%	35.3%	26.1%	14.7%
I had to unenroll / drop out of PSU	9.3%	14.7%	10.9%	8.8%
I am unsure of my academic plans	38.3%	47.1%	39.1%	23.5%
Some or all of my academic plans were delayed by at least one quarter	33.6%	26.5%	31.5%	11.8%
The pandemic did not impact my plans for the upcoming academic year	27.1%	26.5%	28.3%	55.9%

## Impact of the Pandemic on Academic Plans

When asked to describe how the pandemic has impacted their academic progress and plans, students reported largely negative impacts due to the sudden shift to fully online learning. Many students had difficulty adjusting to this format, such as not having access to the resources they needed to succeed in the class as well as an increased workload compared to in-person classes. Students also described how the lack of peer-to-peer and student-instructor interaction negatively impacted their learning and academic performance.

”

***I had financial difficulties getting internet and was unable to get some course materials.***

- PSU student, 2020

“

***I was only able to take one class. Usually, I take three or four classes. It seemed like there was more work online than there usually is if I was taking a class in person.***

- PSU student, 2020

”

***The lack of in-person instruction and interaction with peers and professors made me feel less connected to the material and impacted my ability to learn and retain the information presented.***

- PSU student, 2020

Students also described challenges working from home, including distractions or obligations at home that made it difficult to focus on their classes and studying.

*I am a single mom. When schools closed in March and my daughter was then home 24/7, I had to help her with her online school every day, work from home, AND try to do all the PSU classes as well. I fell behind in all three of my classes... It made me decide to only register for part-time in the fall because my daughter will be home again.*

- PSU student, 2020



Image Credits:  
Portland State University

*It is very difficult to study at home when I am surrounded by chores that need to be done, children that need help with homework, and needy pets.*

- PSU student, 2020

Finally, students described both short- and long-term academic impacts resulting from the pandemic. These included not being able to take classes needed for graduation; grades that suffered; decreased learning and retention; delayed milestones or graduation; choosing to discontinue their education or making other major changes to their academic plans; unexpected financial costs related to their educational pursuits; and stress or depression brought on by the pandemic that made it difficult to focus on coursework.

“

***My classes were cancelled because they couldn't be done remotely.***

- PSU student, 2020

”

***I was unable to graduate last spring. I am unable to go to school full time the following academic school year because I don't have enough money saved.***

- PSU student, 2020

“

***The isolation and anxiety made it difficult to focus on coursework. The inability to go to a classroom setting and interact with people directly left me feeling pretty depressed. I didn't perform as well as I could have because of it.***

- PSU student, 2020

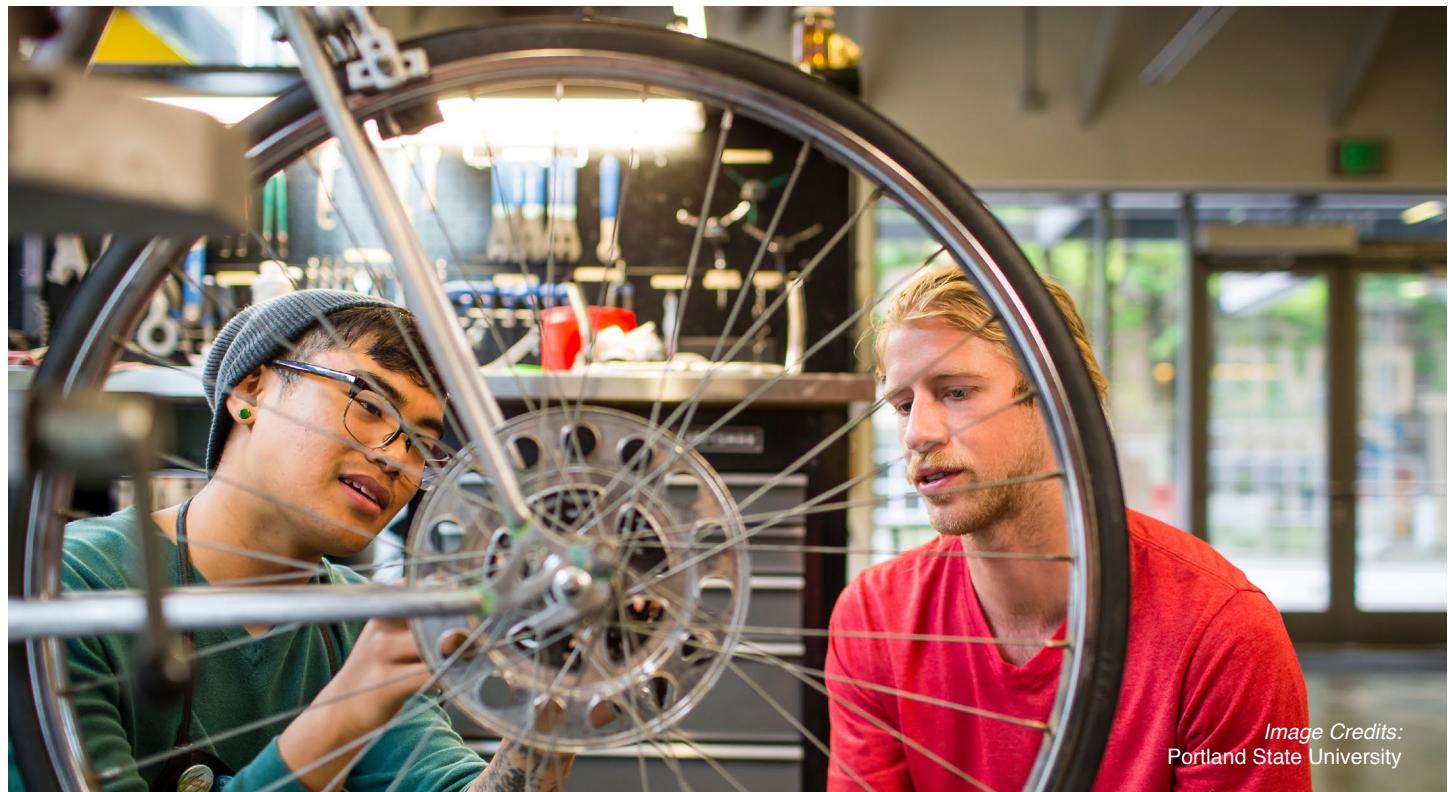
## Job Security During the Pandemic

Over a third of the students who completed this survey (35.5%,  $n = 59$ ) reported being laid off or fired from a job because of the pandemic, with an additional 30% ( $n = 50$ ) reporting reduced hours or pay. Not surprisingly, employment changes were associated with basic needs insecurity.

Nearly 90% of students who lost their jobs or had reduced hours or pay reported experiencing housing insecurity, homelessness, or food insecurity during the pandemic (see Figure 34).

Of the students who qualified for and applied for unemployment benefits, nearly 40% reported that they were still waiting to receive them. Further, 62.1% of students with basic needs insecurities reported that plans for employment or paid work fell through because of the pandemic, compared to 29.4% of students who were secure in their basic needs during the pandemic.

**FIGURE 34. Job Security During the Pandemic**



*Image Credits:  
Portland State University*

## Impact of the Pandemic on Student Job Security

Students were asked to describe the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their employment and income. Similar to the quantitative data reported above, many students reported being laid off or let go, which made them unsure how to afford rent or costs related to attending PSU. Some students were waiting for their place of employment to reopen, while others students' places of work fully shut down or could not rehire them. Many students were also concerned about their job prospects after they graduate considering the unknown duration and economic impacts of the pandemic.

***My hours were reduced by 50%, I was forced to look for new work and the change in pay made me fall behind in my financial obligations which led to a very stressful homelife. My partner also lost his job, and I was the sole income earner for the household.***

- PSU student, 2020

“

***My source of income was heavily impacted by the pandemic. My mother, who is my second source of income, was furloughed. I live on campus, and paying rent and utilities is even more difficult than ever.***

- PSU student, 2020

”

***I don't have a job lined up, but I'm set to graduate either Fall 2020 or Winter 2020. The pandemic is making me worried that I'll enter a job market with no opportunity.***

- PSU student, 2020

Further, some students indicated that work they had planned on or were depending on in the future fell through, while others said that financial stressors pressured them into taking on work that made them feel unsafe.

“

*My primary job is driving for Lyft. Work decreased dramatically because of the lockdown, and driving has been more dangerous because of the risk of COVID-19.*

- PSU student, 2020

“

*... I had to scramble to find a new job. I managed to find a job... but my rent was late that month, I had to run up both of my credit cards, and now I have to work for a company that expects me to put my life on the line.*

- PSU student, 2020

Students also explained situations in which they were ineligible for unemployment benefits or had not received much-needed unemployment checks.

“

*As a seasonal worker who consistently switches between the same two seasonal workplaces every year, I was not eligible for unemployment benefits... I applied for the PUA [Pandemic Unemployment Assistance] that was supposed to be for people who weren't eligible for normal unemployment... [I] have not seen any confirmation toward that... let alone any money.*

- PSU student, 2020

“

*I had reduced hours and staggered shifts. But because we had an outbreak at our work, they closed entirely for a month. Unemployment has not completed processing my application and it's been almost three months since I applied.*

- PSU student, 2020

## Student Stories

### Loss of stability due to COVID

She drives a school bus to pay her bills while working toward her degree in criminal justice.

It's tough to pay for college without help or financial aid, she said. Amid COVID, it has become almost impossible.

When schools shut down in March, she lost her income. Unemployment isn't enough to cover her expenses. She skips meals several times a week to save money, and she worries what she will have to cut next.

"I lay awake wondering how I'm going to survive with the possibility of having to live in my car," she said.

Since March, she has missed three rent payments. Her landlord is working with her, but she has no idea when she will get her next paycheck.

In the meantime, she does her homework in the parking lot of her friend's apartment in order to access the internet.

She doesn't qualify for loans because of her credit. And she already reached the cap on financial aid support, which means she can't access the program where transfer students finish free either, she said. She was also turned down for money through the CARES Act Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund, she said, because her program is online only.

If she could attend full time, she would finish next fall. As it is, taking one class at a time, it might take another three years.

- Undergraduate student
- School bus driver
- Housing and food insecure due to COVID

"I'm eager to finish my degree," she said. "This has been a dream of mine for many, many years."

"Now I have to choose between my education and living in a home."

Still, she knows that it could be worse.

"I think about all the people who are going through this process who are on the streets. It hurts me that we have politicians that can't seem to look past their noses at the people we have on the street - students who are on the street."

“

***I lay awake wondering how  
I'm going to survive with  
the possibility of having to  
live in my car.***

#### Crisis Support

*This report covers a difficult topic and many of the personal stories include traumatic experiences including assault and identity-based violence. If you have experienced similar events or are currently struggling with these experiences, know that help is available.*

- Lifeline offers crisis support to all at 800-273-8255 or [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org).

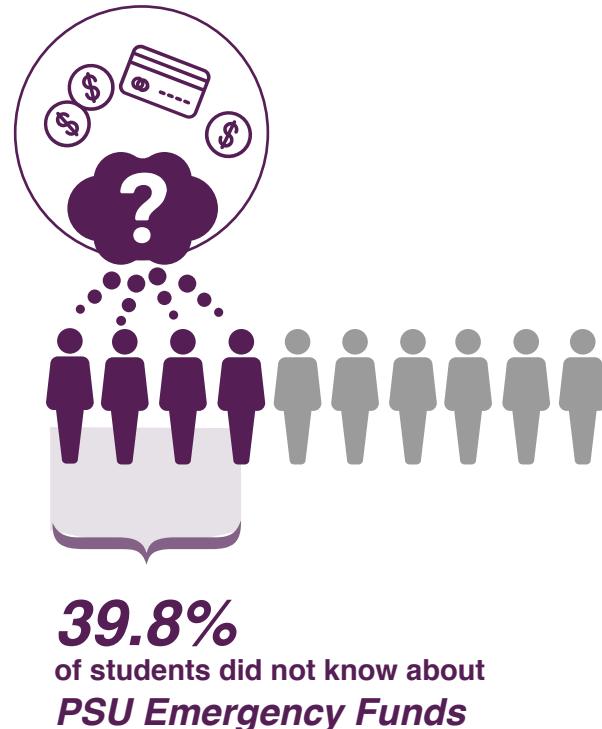
**Notes:** Employee stories come from personal interviews with employees who volunteered to share their experiences. Names have been omitted to protect their privacy.

## Financial Support During the Pandemic

Students were also asked about a variety of campus-based financial resources and government supports they may have used to help pay for their basic needs during the pandemic. Nearly 70% of students indicated that they qualified for the CARES stimulus check, and 93% had received that check by the time of the survey (July 2020). These rates were similar among both students experiencing basic needs insecurity and those who were secure in their basic needs.

Further, 55.4% of the sample received financial support from at least one PSU emergency fund. Students who reported experiencing housing insecurity, homelessness, or food insecurity during the pandemic reported receiving these funds at a higher rate (59.8% of insecure students received them compared to 38.2% of secure students), suggesting that this financial support went to those students who most needed it. The most commonly received PSU emergency funds were the PSU COVID-19 Emergency Fund (CARES Act) for students (received by 75 students in our study); the PSU General Student Emergency Fund (received by 18 students in our study); and the Services for Students with Children Jim Sells COVID-19 Hardship Fund (received by 10 students in our study). However, 4.8% of the students who applied for these funds had their applications denied, and 39.8% of students reported not knowing that these emergency funds were available from PSU.

**FIGURE 35.** Students Who Did Not Know About PSU Emergency Funds During the Pandemic



“

*The one-time funds were helpful, but the pandemic has gone on for much longer, and I am still in need of ongoing financial assistance. The CARES Act funds only got me through the first month, and now it has been five months with no end in sight.*

- PSU student, 2020

## **Impact of the Pandemic on Student Finances**

Students described a high level of stress due to financial changes that were a direct product of the pandemic, including financial losses such as diminished savings accounts. Students also described numerous unexpected expenses due to the pandemic, such as purchasing work-from-home equipment and costs associated with taking care of family members or children who were now staying at home, or sudden health insurance costs due to job loss.



***I had a savings account of over 3k in March, and that was wiped out when I was forced into quarantine and had to pay for the hotel for a 21 day stay in an extended stay hotel. I also had to get a storage unit.***

- PSU student, 2020



***I had to purchase home office equipment and upgrade internet access or be laid off. I also spent more on energy costs being home.***

- PSU student, 2020



***With my kids here all the time, I have spent [extra] money on food and activities to keep them active and entertained so I could both work and attend school, and I am still paying for daycare to maintain their spots.***

- PSU student, 2020

While many students benefited from PSU emergency funds, a large number of students indicated not knowing that these emergency funding sources were available to them. Some students also indicated that they did not qualify for the funds despite being in a difficult financial situation caused by the pandemic.

*I had no idea that this many resources existed.  
I am a part of two of these colleges, and they never informed me that they had funds if I needed them.  
I feel let down.*

- PSU student, 2020



*Image Credits:  
Bethany Legg - Unsplash*

*I tried really hard, but because I had chosen all online classes for the last (spring) term, they all told me I did not qualify. I was very devastated... I really needed the assistance.*

- PSU student, 2020

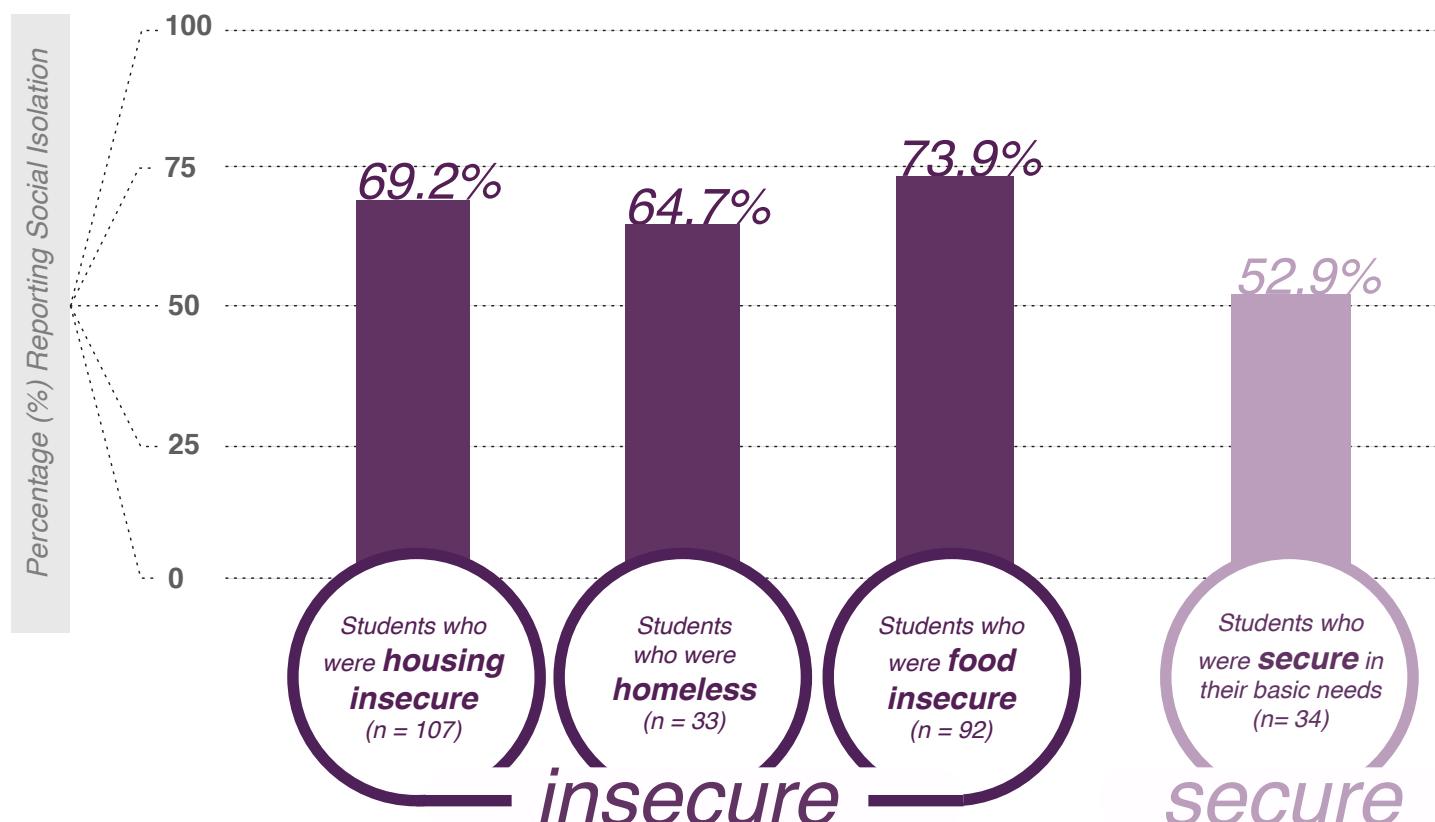
## Social Life and Health During the Pandemic

In addition to students' academic, employment, and financial experiences during the pandemic, it was also important to examine social and health impacts, and whether these differed based on students' levels of basic needs insecurity.

### Social Isolation

Given high rates of isolation experienced as a result of social distancing practices, we first asked students to rate the level of social isolation they had experienced during the pandemic on a scale of 1 = *not isolated at all* to 5 = *very isolated*. Students who reported feeling *isolated* or *very isolated* were categorized as experiencing social isolation. Rates of social isolation were higher among students who experienced housing insecurity, homelessness, or food insecurity compared to students who were secure in their basic needs (see Figure 36).

**FIGURE 36.** Percentage of Students Experiencing Social Isolation During the Pandemic According to Basic Needs Insecurity



## Staying Connected

Students were then asked to indicate the ways in which they stayed connected to friends and loved ones during the pandemic (Table 33). The most common methods were text messages and phone or video calls, and these methods did not differ depending on whether students experienced basic needs insecurity or not.

**TABLE 33.** Methods for Staying Socially Connected During the Pandemic

Method for Staying Socially Connected	Percentage Who Reported
Text messaging	88%
Phone call	79.5%
Social media	71.7%
Video calls	69.9%
Socially distanced visits (i.e., in-person gatherings that maintained a healthy social distance)	44%
Creating a “pod” (i.e., being quarantined with a small group of people who are socially isolated from everyone else except those in the pod)	20.5%
Non-socially distanced visits (i.e., normal social gatherings)	15.1%

(n = 166)



*Image Credits:*  
Portland State University

## Health Challenges

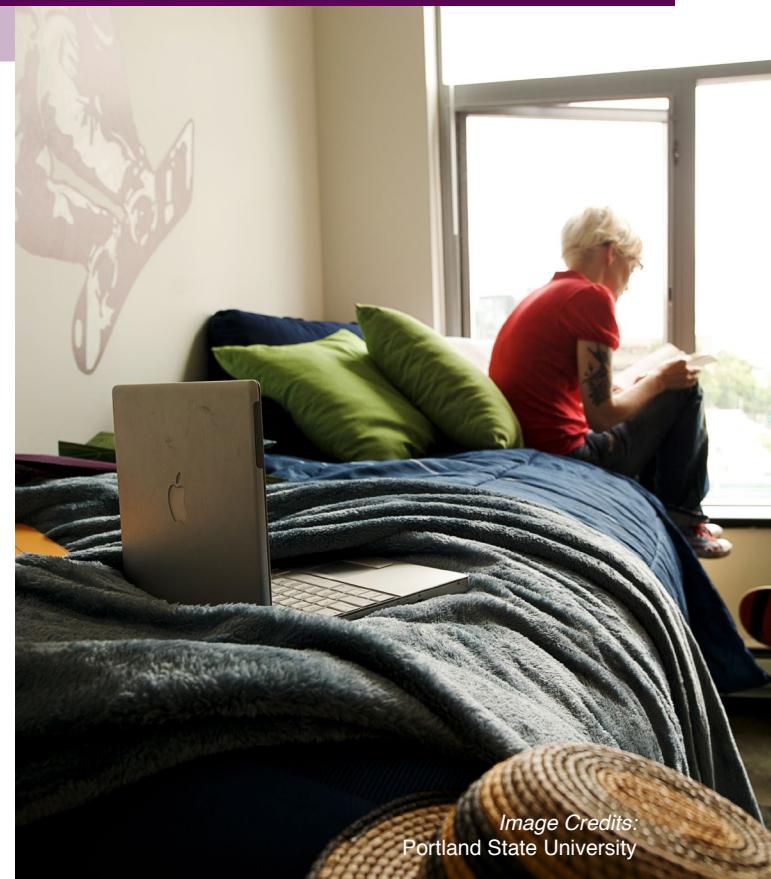
We also asked students about a variety of health-related challenges they may have experienced as a result of the pandemic. First, students were asked to indicate the extent to which their physical and mental health interfered with their daily activities in the past month, from 1 = not at all to 5 = extremely. Students who reported moderately, quite a bit, or extremely were categorized as having physical and/or mental health interferences. As Figure 37 illustrates, rates of physical and mental health interference were higher for students who experienced housing insecurity, homelessness, or food insecurity during the pandemic compared to students who were secure in their basic needs.

**FIGURE 37.** Health Interferences During the Pandemic According to Basic Needs Insecurity

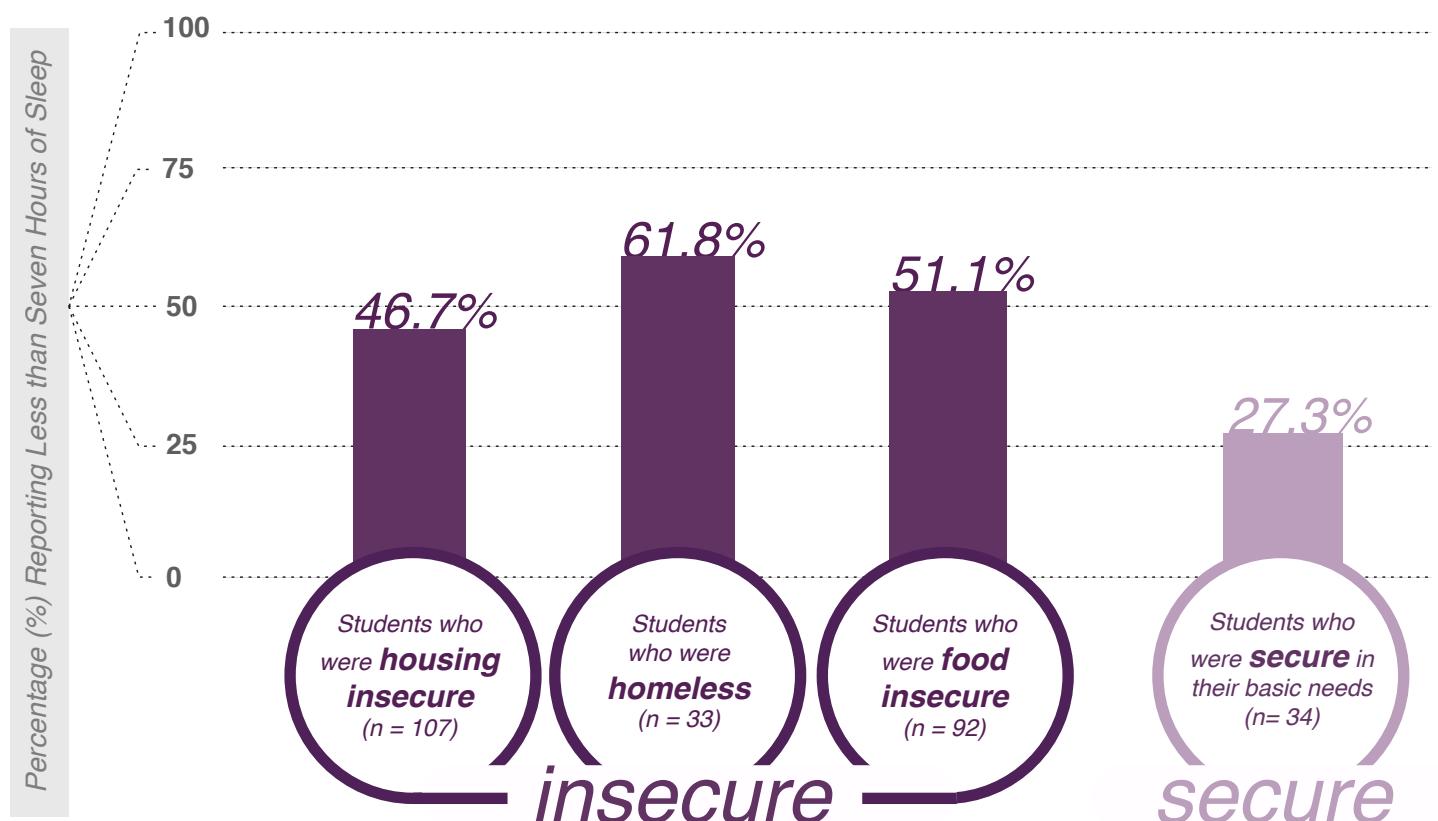


## Sleep

We also asked students to report how much sleep they got each night. While over half the sample reported sleeping seven or more hours per night, students who experienced basic needs insecurity during the pandemic were more likely to report sleeping fewer than seven hours per night compared to students who were secure in their basic needs (see Figure 38).



**FIGURE 38.** Percentage of Students Who Slept Fewer than Seven Hours Per Night During the Pandemic According to Basic Needs Insecurity



## Stress

Finally, we asked students to indicate the level of stress they had experienced in the past week on a scale of 0 = no stress to 10 = extreme stress. As Figure 39 demonstrates, students who experienced basic needs insecurity during the pandemic reported higher levels of stress than those who were secure in their basic needs. In general, mental health concerns were a bigger challenge for all students compared to physical health concerns.

**FIGURE 39.** Level of Stress During the Pandemic According to Basic Needs Insecurity



## Impact of the Pandemic on Students' Social Lives and Health

We asked students several open-ended questions about their social experiences, mental and physical health, and ways they were managing the impacts of COVID-19 on their lives. Students described drastic changes to their social lives and high levels of social isolation. Most students indicated that they were no longer seeing any friends or loved ones, and that they had not been leaving their homes or apartments except for essential errands. Many discussed the difficulties of staying in touch with loved ones only through technology as well as the impacts of social isolation on their mental health.

***I really crave personal social interaction face to face. It is hard for me to isolate and only talk on the phone or Zoom. I feel like it really crushed my emotional well being. COVID made my social life almost cease to exist.***

- PSU student, 2020

***I lost a family member during spring term and instead of grieving with family in person, it had to be done over the phone.***

- PSU student, 2020

***I don't hang out with my friends as often anymore... I feel guilty and paranoid that my friends might have COVID... [and I don't want to] spread it unknowingly. Now, I've been stuck inside and I feel like my depression has gotten worse. My depression has gotten so severe that I don't feel like reaching out.***

- PSU student, 2020

When discussing the impact of the pandemic on their physical health, students described being more sedentary due to staying indoors or not having access to the spaces and equipment they would usually use to exercise. Further, many students indicated interrupted sleep patterns, often due to anxiety, stress, or circumstances at home. Students also described changes in eating patterns, both positive (e.g., being able to cook at home and eat healthier) and negative (e.g., not having access to the healthful foods they once did and eating poorly due to stress or boredom). Of particular concern, some students described a lack of access to healthcare or health appointments due to the pandemic, which has caused some health problems to go untreated or become more severe.

“

*I have been so much less active. I used to take dance classes, and walk everywhere. That all stopped when we had to stay home. I now only walk to the grocery store and back about twice per week.*

- PSU student, 2020

”

*I've had increased migraines and chronic eye fatigue from constantly staring at my computer. I have experienced muscle soreness, joint stiffness, and I've thrown out my neck and my back from extended periods of sitting. I haven't been sleeping well because of the stress and because my back hurts so badly that I can't roll over in my sleep. I stay up later than I ever have, and I don't wake up feeling rested.*

- PSU student, 2020

“

*My [chronic illness] has continued to flare, and I have a ton of other physical health issues. I have had a hard time getting all my needs met since the doctors are trying to minimize in person care. I have had to go in for urgent procedures and testing, which has been scary.*

- PSU student, 2020

When discussing the impacts of the pandemic on mental and emotional health, students described heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and isolation. Some students also described increased irritability and an overall lack of motivation due to the impacts of the pandemic on their lives.

***Extreme lack of motivation and feelings of isolation. Stress due to course work and feelings of being near homelessness.  
Missing out on major opportunities... has had a big impact on my mental health.***

- PSU student, 2020

“

***It's terrible. Stress is the new norm, anxiousness around others has gotten worse, and I have fear of leaving anywhere to get anything because who knows what will happen.***

- PSU student, 2020

”

***I overthink everything and can't always focus on the priorities because of the impact on the world right now. I can't sleep and want to be an ally, be a good mother, teacher and friend. I need to be able to process all these things and new concerns and issues keep arising each day, it seems.***

- PSU student, 2020

Finally, when asked how they were managing the impacts of COVID-19 on their lives, students described a range of experiences. Some described having a difficult time coping with the changes in their lives and concerns for the future. Others indicated experiencing ups and downs and taking it day-by-day. Still others acknowledged the difficulties that they and others are facing while also expressing hope as they look outward and reflect on positive changes in the world around them.

“

*I no longer feel like myself. I do not feel resilient, happy go lucky, optimistic, and I have no hopes for changing careers when I graduate. I do not see the struggle ending soon...*

- PSU student, 2020

”

*I think I'm doing okay, but COVID has definitely changed the way I do things, my perspective on other people, and how my family functions. I am more worried about my family and food security, finances, and mental health than I was previously.*

- PSU student, 2020

“

*I have experienced and seen more food/resource sharing happening between friends, neighbors, communities. While it is scary and hard that this scarcity is happening, I have felt encouraged to see communities come together to help care for one another.*

- PSU student, 2020

---

# *Conclusions and Next Steps*

---

# Conclusions and Next Steps

## PSU Student Survey Findings Compared to State and National Figures

The findings of our student survey are broadly in line with other state and national surveys on college and university student basic needs insecurity (we are unable to compare our employee findings given the lack of available comparison studies). The PSU study reveals that Black and Native American students, students identifying as nonbinary or transgender, students enrolled part-time, and students who are former foster youth are at greater risk of basic needs insecurity, which mirrors the results of a 2019 survey by the Hope Center at Temple University of 167,000 students across 171 two-year institutions and 56 four-year institutions (Baker-Smith et al., 2020).

At PSU, students reported higher rates of housing and food insecurity compared to the average rates across four-year institutions included in the 2019 Hope Center study (see Table 34). The Hope Center found that 33% of respondents experienced food insecurity in the previous month compared to 47% in the PSU survey; and 35% of Hope Center respondents experienced housing insecurity in the previous year compared to 44% at PSU. The rate of homelessness was identical in both studies, with 16% of respondents experiencing homelessness in the previous year. The Hope Center's 2019 survey of 8,100 students at 14 Oregon community colleges reported that 41% of respondents experienced food insecurity in the pre-

vious 30 days (note PSU's rate is even higher), 52% of respondents experienced housing insecurity in the previous year, and 20% of respondents experienced homelessness in the previous year. The rate of food insecurity in our study was slightly higher than the 42% rate that PSU's Committee for Improving Student Food Security found in their 2018 survey.

## Impacts on Student Success and Retention

Beyond the impacts on health, safety, and quality of life, basic needs insecurity among students has been shown to influence academic performance, retention, and completion. The Hope Center's national survey revealed that students who have experienced food insecurity, housing insecurity, or homelessness report lower GPAs than students who are secure in those categories. These findings are supported by a study conducted at two Maryland community colleges that found that students experiencing food insecurity were more likely than food secure students to report a lower GPA (2.0–2.49) versus a higher GPA (3.5–4.0) (Maroto, Snelling, & Linck, 2015). A study conducted at the University of Maryland found that students who had experienced homelessness were 13 times more likely to have failed courses and 11 times more likely to have withdrawn or not registered for more courses (Silva et al., 2017). Students who had experienced severe food insecurity were nearly 15 times more likely to have failed courses and six times more likely to have withdrawn or not registered for more courses (Silva et al., 2017).

**TABLE 34.** Comparison of PSU Student Findings with Other State and National Surveys

	Portland State University	Oregon Community Colleges	U.S. Four-Year Institutions
Housing Insecurity (past year)	44%	52%	35%
Homelessness (past year)	16%	20%	16%
Food Insecurity (past 30 days)	47%	41%	33%

**Note:** Our housing insecurity measure included three additional items not included in the Hope Studies. The measures are otherwise the same.

## Current Resources for Students

Below, we outline current resources and programs available to support the basic needs of students at PSU. Additional information on most of the resources listed below can be found online at [pdx.edu/student-affairs](http://pdx.edu/student-affairs).

### Financial Support

- Financial hardship grants and loans are available to all PSU students through the Student Accounts Office, the Financial Wellness Center, and Student Affairs, depending on available funding and number of applications. Most schools and colleges also offer emergency funds for their enrolled students, and several resource centers have similar programs.

### Food Insecurity

- The PSU Committee for Improving Student Food Security offers a free food market on the second Monday of every month in partnership with the Oregon Food Bank and distributes meal vouchers to students. Details available at [pdx.edu/student-access-center/free-food-market](http://pdx.edu/student-access-center/free-food-market).
- SNAP enrollment assistance is provided by trained staff and volunteers at a number of different programs and offices across campus.
- A student-run **PSU Food Pantry** offers free food to PSU students.
- A weekly PSU Farmers Market held on campus accepts SNAP cards.

### Housing and Homelessness

- Student Legal Services provides assistance to resolve landlord/tenant issues affecting students.
- A 24-hour shelter for students experiencing homelessness, hosted by a local faith organization, is in the preliminary planning stages.
- The PSU Student Housing Assistance Program Pilot, in partnership with College Housing NW, provides a 50% rent subsidy to students experiencing or at immediate risk of homelessness.
- Shower facilities are available in the Student Recreation Center on a keycard access basis.

### Comprehensive Support

- The Office of the Dean of Student Life provides a set of essential services for students, with a new Basic Needs Hub recently launched to provide coordinated service access and delivery.
  - The Coordination - Assessment - Response - Education (CARE) Team provides case management and support to students experiencing a crisis.
  - A SNAP Employment and Training program provides case management and pays qualified expenses to support SNAP-eligible students in job training, placement, and retention.
- Resource centers provide wraparound supports and services tailored to the needs of different groups of PSU students, including advising, resources, and service connections to assist with meeting basic needs:
  - Pan-African Commons
  - Native American Student & Community Center
  - La Casa Latina Student Center
  - Pacific Islander, Asian, and Asian American Student Center
  - MENASA Initiative
  - Multicultural Student Center
  - Women's Resource Center
  - Queer Resource Center
  - Veterans Resource Center
  - Disability Resource center
  - Resource Center for Students with Children

## Current Resources for Employees

Campus-specific resources and programs for employees include the following:

- The PSU Committee for Improving Student Food Security offers a - free food market the second Monday of each month in partnership with the Oregon Food Bank. Details available at [pdx.edu/student-access-center/free-food-market](http://pdx.edu/student-access-center/free-food-market).
- A weekly PSU Farmers Market held on campus accepts SNAP cards.
- The free Employee Assistance Program provides financial coaching, among other services.

## Next Steps

This survey was designed to provide a foundation for Portland State University to work from in determining how to best address housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity among students and employees. A review of regional and national studies indicates that the university has already implemented many suggested best practices, as shown in the student resource list above. However, the findings of our study demonstrate that these programs may not be of sufficient scale to reach all those in need and that greater outreach and communications might also be necessary. Nearly 19% of respondents did not know that PSU had a food pantry and nearly 24% did not know there was a free food market. Students and employees also expressed concerns about barriers to accessing these programs and resources, including accommodating work schedules. Ongoing review of each program using an equity lens centered on race would help to ensure continued and enhanced effectiveness and cultural appropriateness.

The following broad recommendations are based on established best practices from other institutions, as well as student and employee survey data and open-ended responses. They are not meant to represent the full spectrum of available options.

- The university offers a range of services and programs to meet student basic needs, but students repeatedly requested longer hours and expanded offerings. A frequent student recommendation was that PSU work to ensure adequate and ongoing funding and staffing for these programs to facilitate expanded access. This was especially salient in students' comments about the food pantry and free food market.
- Students are often uncertain about eligibility requirements for services and emergency funding, or are simply unaware that supports and resources are available. PSU should broaden outreach to educate students around available basic needs support and eligibility, and should work closely with resource centers and student organizations to train their staff and volunteers in the full range of services the university offers and how to access those services.

- Both students and employees expressed concerns that the costs of attending PSU and living in Portland have far outpaced increases in wages, financial aid, and related assistance programs. This financial insecurity and resulting housing and food insecurity will be felt all the more acutely both during and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Emergency aid funds for students and employees at the college and university level will be critical, as will continued advocacy for increased state, federal, and philanthropic funding to both address and prevent basic needs insecurity.

PSU administrators should work closely with student and employee groups, especially those representing individuals at higher risk of experiencing basic needs insecurity due to systemic and historical racism and discrimination, to (1) assess the effectiveness and appropriateness of current programs and resources; (2) bring forward suggestions for new opportunities; and (3) facilitate advocacy for additional fundraising to expand existing programs and develop new solutions to better meet the needs of the PSU community.

We hope the findings of this report will serve as a starting point for campus dialogue, planning, and action as we work together to support students and employees in meeting their basic needs for food and housing.



*Image Credits:  
Portland State University*

---

# References

---

# References

American Federation of Teachers. (2020). An Army of Temps: AFT 2020 Adjunct Faculty Quality of Work/Life Report. American Federation of Teachers.

[https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/adjuncts\\_qualityworklife2020.pdf](https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/adjuncts_qualityworklife2020.pdf)

Baker-Smith, C., Coca, V., Goldrick-Rab, S., Looker, E., Richardson, B., and Williams, T. (2020). #RealCollege 2020: Five Years of Evidence on Campus Basic Needs Insecurity. Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice.

[https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/2019\\_RealCollege\\_Survey\\_Report.pdf](https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/2019_RealCollege_Survey_Report.pdf)

Broton, K. M. (2020). A review of estimates of housing insecurity and homelessness among students in U.S. higher education. *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless*, 29(1), 25–38.

Cheetham, J. (2020, June 16). Navajo Nation: The people battling America's worst coronavirus outbreak. BBC. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52941984>

Crutchfield, R. M., & Maguire, J. (2017). Researching basic needs in higher education: Qualitative and quantitative instruments to explore a holistic understanding of food and housing insecurity. Long Beach, California: Basic Needs Initiative, Office of the Chancellor, California State University.

<https://www2.calstate.edu/impact-of-the-csu/student-success/basic-needs-initiative/Documents/researching-basic-needs.pdf>

Crutchfield, R., & Maguire, J. (2018). Study of Student Basic Needs. Long Beach, California: Basic Needs Initiative, Office of the Chancellor, California State University.

[https://www2.calstate.edu/impact-of-the-csu/student-success/basic-needs-initiative/Documents/Basic-NeedsStudy\\_phasell\\_withAccessibilityComments.pdf](https://www2.calstate.edu/impact-of-the-csu/student-success/basic-needs-initiative/Documents/Basic-NeedsStudy_phasell_withAccessibilityComments.pdf)

Goldrick-Rab, S., Baker-Smith, C., Coca, V., Looker, E., & Williams, T. (2019). College and University Basic Needs Insecurity: A National #Realcollege Survey Report. Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice. [https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/HOPE\\_realcollege\\_National\\_report\\_digital.pdf](https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/HOPE_realcollege_National_report_digital.pdf)

Goldrick-Rab, S., Coca, V., Kienzl, G., Welton, C. R., Dahl, S., & Magnelia, S. (2020). #RealCollege During the Pandemic: New Evidence on Basic Needs Insecurity. Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice.

[https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Hopecenter\\_RealCollegeDuringthePandemic.pdf](https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Hopecenter_RealCollegeDuringthePandemic.pdf)

Goldrick-Rab, S., Richardson, J., Schneider, J., Hernandez, A., & Cady, C. (2018). Still Hungry and Homeless in College. Wisconsin HOPE Lab.

<https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Wisconsin-HOPE-Lab-Still-Hungry-and-Homeless.pdf>

Haskett, M. E., Majumder, S., Wright, S., & Kotter-Grühn, D. (2018). Food and housing security among NC State students. North Carolina State University.

<https://dasa.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/NC-State-Food-and-Housing-Insecurity-1.pdf>

Human Rights Watch. (2020, May 12). COVID-19 fueling anti-Asian racism and xenophobia worldwide. Human Rights Watch. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/12/covid-19-fueling-anti-asian-racism-and-xenophobia-worldwide>.

- Klepfer, K., Cornett, A., Fletcher, C., & Webster, J. (2019). Student Financial Wellness Survey Report: Fall 2018 Implementation. Trellis Company.  
<https://www.trelliscompany.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Fall-2018-SFWS-Report.pdf>
- Long, D. A., & Perkins, D. D. (2003). Confirmatory factor analysis of the sense of community index and development of a brief SCI. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 31(3), 279-296.
- Maroto, M.E., Snelling, A., & Linck, H. (2015). Food insecurity among community college students: Prevalence and association with grade point average. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 39, 515-526,
- Oppel, R. A. Jr, Gabeloff, R., Lai, K. K. R., Wright, W., & Smith, M.(July 5, 2020). The fullest look yet at the racial inequality of coronavirus. New York Times. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/05/us/coronavirus-latinos-african-americans-cdc-data.html>
- Quirk, A. (July 28, 2020). Mental health support for students of color during and after the coronavirus pandemic. Center for American Progress. Retrieved from <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/news/2020/07/28/488044/mental-health-support-students-color-coronavirus-pandemic/>
- Russell, D., Peplau, L. A., & Ferguson, M. L. (1978). Developing a measure of loneliness. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 42(3), 290-294.
- Sax, L. J., Gilmartin, S. K., & Bryant, A. N. (2003). Assessing response rates and nonresponse bias in web and paper surveys. *Research in higher education*, 44(4), 409-432.
- Silva, M. R., et al. (2017). The relationship between food security, housing stability, and school performance among college students in an urban university. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 19(3), 284–299.
- Taylor, A., Murillo, R., Businelle, M. S., Chen, T. A., Kendzor, D. E., McNeill, L. H., & Reitzel, L. R. (2019). Physical activity and sleep problems in homeless adults. *PloS one*, 14(7).
- United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service (2012). U.S. adult food security survey module: Three-stage design, with screeners.
- United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. (2019). Definitions of Food Security. Retrieved from <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security/#ranges>
- United States Government Accountability Office. (2018). Food insecurity: Better information could help eligible college students access federal food assistance benefits. United States Government Accountability Office. Retrieved from <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/696254.pdf>
- Wilking, J., Roll, S., & Kornbluh, M. (2020). Assessing Housing Needs and Programs at Chico State After the Camp Fire. California State University, Chico.  
[https://www.csuchico.edu/sen/\\_assets/documents/as/20-01-30/assessing-housing-needs.pdf](https://www.csuchico.edu/sen/_assets/documents/as/20-01-30/assessing-housing-needs.pdf)
- Zapata M.A., Liu J., Everett L., Hulseman P., Potiowsky T., & Willingham E. (2019). Governance, Costs, and Revenue Raising to Address and Prevent Homelessness in the Portland Tri-County Region. Portland State University.  
<https://www.pdx.edu/homelessness/sites/g/files/znlchr1791/files/2020-05/RegionalHomelessnessReport.pdf>

---

# *Appendices*

---

## Appendix A

### Student Sample Description

Student participants ranged in age from 18 to 73, with a mean of 27 years, which is similar to the average age of 28 among all PSU students. In the table below, we note percentages of students in our sample who identified with each demographic or student experience category. The number of students who responded to each demographic or student experience question is noted beside the label for that category. Where possible, we provide comparisons with university rates.

**TABLE A1.** Student Demographics and Experiences

	Student Sample Percentage	PSU Student Population (Fall 2019) Percentage*
<b>Race or Ethnicity (n = 3,304)</b>		
Asian or Asian American	12.5%	8.5%
Black or African American	4.2%	3.5%
Hispanic or Latino/a/x	14.2%	15%
Middle Eastern or North African	1.6%	N/A
Native American	3.2%	1%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1.9%	0.5%
Multiracial	5.4%	6%
White	69%	55%
Race not listed	0.3%	N/A
Prefer not to answer	3.5%	4%

\*Note: Comparisons between our student sample and the full student body should be made with caution due to differences in data collection and reporting approaches. PSU records only one racial or ethnic category per student, whereas students in our study were asked to select all that apply. Thus, percentages total more than 100.

**TABLE A1.** Student Demographics and Experiences  
*(Continued)*

	<b>Student Sample Percentage</b>	<b>PSU Student Population (Fall 2019) Percentage*</b> <i>(n = 23,362)</i>
<b>Gender Identity (n = 3,301)</b>		
Woman	62.8%	55.8%
Man	26.8%	44.1%
Trans Woman	0.3%	
Trans Man	1.2%	
Transgender	0.2%	
Non-binary, including gender fluid and gender non-conforming	4.1%	
Genderqueer	1.0%	
Two-spirit	0.3%	
Agender	0.5%	
Questioning or unsure	0.8%	
Identity/identities not listed	0.4%	
Prefer not to answer	1.6%	

**\*Note:** Comparisons between our student sample and the full student body should be made with caution due to differences in data collection and reporting approaches. Campus rates were reported as male or female, while in our study we included additional categories beyond the male/female binary.

**TABLE A1.** Student Demographics and Experiences (*Continued*)

	Student Sample Percentage
<b>Sexual Orientation (n = 3,276)</b>	
Asexual	3.9%
Bisexual	14.5%
Gay	3.1%
Heterosexual/Straight	58.1%
Lesbian	2.2%
Pansexual	4.3%
Queer	5.8%
Questioning or unsure	2.8%
Same Gender Loving	0.1%
Identity/Identities not listed	0.7%
Prefer not to answer	4.4%
<b>Relationship Status (n = 3,288)</b>	
Single	42.4%
In relationship(s)	37.8%
Married or domestic partnership	16.5%
Divorced	1.9%
Separated	0.6%
Widowed	0.2%
Relationship status not listed	0.5%
<b>Highest Level of Education Completed by Parents and/or guardians (n = 3,286)</b>	
No high school diploma	7.7%
High school diploma or GED	17.0%
Some college (but not college degree)	20.3%
Associate's degree	8.2%
Bachelor's degree	24.9%
Graduate degree	21.8%

**TABLE A1.** Student Demographics and Experiences (*Continued*)

Student Sample Percentage
<b>Housing Situations Over the Past Year (select all that apply) (n = 3,511)</b>
Staying in rented or owned houses, mobile homes, or apartments, alone or with roommates 57.0%
Staying in rented or owned houses, mobile homes, or apartments with family members 44.2%
Staying in campus or university housing 21.4%
Sorority or fraternity house 0.2%
<b>State Currently Living In (n = 3,305)</b>
Oregon 95.2%
Washington 2.8%
Other 2%
<b>Student Life Experiences (n = 3,305)</b>
Transfer student 46.7%
First generation college student 33.8%
Current or former foster youth 2.5%
International student 3.9%
Out-of-state student 16.1%
ESL (English as a Second Language student 3.5%
Veteran 4%
Immigrant to the U.S. 4.5%
DACA student 0.9%
Student athlete 1.2%
Parent of a child under 18 who lives with you 8.9%
<b>Disabilities or Medical Conditions (n = 3,305)</b>
Learning disability 6%
Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) 13.6%
Autism spectrum disorder 1.9%
Physical disability 6.2%
Chronic illness 10.4%
Mental health / psychological disability 43.3%
Condition not listed 0.6%

In the table below, we note percentages of students in our sample who identified with each student characteristic. The number of students who responded to each question is noted beside the label for that category. Where possible, we provide comparisons with university rates.

**TABLE A2.** Student Characteristics

	<b>Student Sample Percentage</b>	<b>PSU Student Population (Fall 2019) Percentage (n = 23,362)</b>
<b>Full Time or Part Time Status (n = 3,511)</b>		
Full time	81.1%	67.6%
Part time	18.9%	32.4%
<b>Type of Degree (n = 3,511)</b>		
Bachelor's	70.2%	75.6%
Graduate	25.3%	19.2%
Post-Baccalaureate	4.6%	5.1%
<b>Current Class Standing (for undergraduate students only) (n = 2,412)</b>		
Freshman	11.3%	12.6%
Sophomore	17.7%	15.6%
Junior	34.5%	27.4%
Senior	36.6%	39%
<b>School or Unit Affiliation (n = 3,511)</b>		
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences	35.7%	31.2%
Maseeh College of Engineering and Computer Science	9.8%	12.9%
School of Social Work	8.5%	5.3%
School of Business	13.2%	16.1%
College of the Arts	7.7%	8.2%
College of Urban and Public Affairs	9.1%	7.8%
College of Education	4.1%	4.5%
School of Public Health	6%	6.1%
Undeclared or Other	6%	7.4%
<b>Class Attendance type (n = 3,511)</b>		
In-person only	53.8%	N/A
Online only	5.3%	N/A
Both in-person and online	40.8%	N/A

## Appendix B

### Employee Sample Description

Employee participants ranged in age from 21 to 84, with a mean of 43 years, which is similar to the average age of 45 among all PSU employees. In the table below, we note percentages of employees in our sample who identified with each demographic or employee experience category. The number of employees who responded to each demographic or employee experience question is noted beside the label for that category. Where possible, we provide comparisons with university rates.

**TABLE B1.** Employee Demographics and Experiences

	Employee Sample Percentage	PSU Employee Population (Fall 2019) Percentage*
<b>Race or Ethnicity (n = 992)</b>		
Asian or Asian American	6.3%	7.8%
Black or African American	2.4%	2.9%
Hispanic or Latino/a/ex	7.1%	6.3%
Middle Eastern or North African	1%	N/A
Native American	1.2%	0.8%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1%	0.3%
Multiracial	3.2%	3.4%
White	82.4%	70%
Prefer not to answer	4.2%	7.8%
Race / ethnicity not listed	0.4%	N/A

**\*Note:** Comparisons between our employee sample and the PSU employee population should be made with caution due to differences in data collection and reporting approaches. PSU records only one racial or ethnic category per employee, whereas employees in our study were asked to select all that apply. Thus, percentages total more than 100.

**TABLE B1.** Employee Demographics and Experiences  
*(Continued)*

	Employee Sample Percentage	PSU Employee Population (Fall 2019) Percentage*
(n = 3,590)		
<b>Gender Identity (n = 990)</b>		
Woman	63%	56%
Man	31.7%	42%
Trans Woman	0.3%	
Trans Man	0.4%	
Transgender	0.1%	
Non-binary, including gender fluid and gender non-conforming	1.4%	
Genderqueer	0.5%	
Agender	0.4%	
Questioning or unsure	0.3%	
Prefer not to answer	1.8%	

**\*Note:** Comparisons between our employee sample and the PSU employee population should be made with caution due to differences in data collection and reporting approaches. Campus rates were reported as male or female, while in our study we included additional categories beyond the male/female binary.

**TABLE B1.** Employee Demographics and Experiences (*Continued*)

	Employee Sample Percentage
<b>Sexual Orientation (n = 988)</b>	
Asexual	2.1%
Bisexual	7.6%
Gay	3.2%
Heterosexual/Straight	70.5%
Lesbian	3.3%
Pansexual	2.3%
Queer	4.7%
Questioning or unsure	0.7%
Same Gender Loving	0.1%
Prefer not to answer	5.4%
<b>Relationship Status (n = 990)</b>	
Single	17%
In a relationship or relationships	15.4%
Married or domestic partnership	61.9%
Divorced	4.2%
Separated	0.8%
Widowed	0.7%
<b>Highest Level of Education (n = 989)</b>	
High school diploma or GED	0.3%
Some college (but not college degree)	6.1%
Associate's degree	1.8%
Bachelor's degree	24.8%
Graduate degree	66.9%

**TABLE B1.** Employee Demographics and Experiences (*Continued*)

Employee Sample Percentage
<b>Highest Level of Education Completed by Parents and/or Guardians (n = 986)</b>
No high school diploma 3.6%
High school diploma or GED 17.1%
Some college (but not college degree) 12.7%
Associate's degree 4%
Bachelor's degree 23%
Graduate degree 39.6%
<b>Housing Situations Over the Past Year (select all that apply) (n = 1,017)</b>
Staying in rented or owned houses, mobile homes, or apartments, alone or with roommates 51.8%
Staying in rented or owned houses, mobile homes, or apartments with family members 46.4%
Staying in campus or university housing 1.2%
<b>State Currently Living In (n = 3,305)</b>
Oregon 96.6%
Washington 3.0%
Other 0.4%
<b>Employee Life Experiences (n = 992)</b>
First generation college student 23.4%
Current or former foster youth 1.5%
Veteran 2.8%
Immigrant to the U.S. 8.2%
Parent of a child under 18 who lives with you 23%
<b>Disabilities or Medical Conditions (n = 992)</b>
Learning disability 3.6%
Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) 7.3%
Autism spectrum disorder 1.1%
Physical disability 6%
Chronic illness 12.6%
Mental health / Psychological disability 24.4%
Condition not listed 0.2%

In the table below, we note percentages of employees in our sample who identified with each employee characteristic. The number of employees who responded to each question is noted beside the label for that category. Where possible, we provide comparisons with university rates. However, given differences in how some employment variables were collected and recorded, we advise caution when making comparisons.

**TABLE B2.** Employee Characteristics

	Employee Sample Percentage	PSU Employee Population (Fall 2019) Percentage (n = 3,590)
<b>Employment Status (n = 1,017)</b>		
Full time	79.8%	72.6%
Part time	20.2%	27.4%
Average length of employment at PSU	7.92 years	9.3 years
<b>Employee Job Category (n = 1,017)</b>		
Staff	53%	40.4%
Faculty	40.4%	57%
Administrator	9%	2.5%
<b>Staff Classification (only asked to staff respondents) (n = 539)</b>		
Salaried	47.1%	46.8%
Hourly	52.9%	53.2%
<b>Tenure Status (only asked to faculty respondents) (n = 411)</b>		
Tenured	24.1%	21.7%
On tenure track but not tenured	8.3%	6.7%
Not on tenure track	67.6%	71.5%
<b>Academic Rank or Title (only asked to faculty respondents) (n = 411)</b>		
Professor	12.2%	12.5%
Associate Professor	12.9%	10.6%
Assistant Professor	12.4%	15.5%
Professor of Practice	3.6%	2%
Research Professor	4.4%	1.9%
Adjunct Instructor/ Professor	27.7%	21.2%
Instructor/ Senior Instructor	15.1%	23.8%
Research Assistant or Associate	6.1%	6.8%
<b>School or Unit Affiliation (only asked to faculty respondents) (n = 411)</b>		
College of the Arts	10%	10%
College of Education	5.4%	9%
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences	40.6%	30%
College of Urban and Public Affairs	10.9%	6.1%
The Graduate School	1.7%	N/A
Maseeh College of Engineering and Computer Science	5.4%	6.9%
School of Public Health	3.4%	2%
School of Social Work	12.2%	7.4%
School of Business	8.0%	6.9%
University Honors College	1.7%	0.6%

## Appendix C

### COVID Sample Description

Student participants in our COVID follow-up survey ranged in age from 18 to 63, with an average age of 31 years old. The tables below present the percentage of students who identified with each demographic or student characteristic.

**TABLE C1. COVID Survey Student Demographics and Experiences**

COVID Survey Student Sample Percentage (n = 166)	
<b>Race or Ethnicity</b>	
Asian or Asian American	11.4%
Black or African American	4.2%
Hispanic or Latino/a/x	18.1%
Middle Eastern or North African	2.4%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	2.4%
Multiracial	10.2%
White	68.7%
Race or ethnicity not listed	4.8%
Prefer not to answer	1.2%
<b>Gender Identity</b>	
Woman	57.2%
Man	27.1%
Trans Woman	0.6%
Trans Man	2.4%
Transgender	0.6%
Non-binary, including gender fluid and gender non-conforming	7.2%
Two-spirit	2.4%
Questioning or unsure	1.2%
Identity/identities not listed	0.6%
Prefer not to answer	0.6%

**TABLE C1. COVID Survey Student Demographics and Experiences (*Continued*)**

		<b>COVID Survey Student Sample Percentage (n = 166)</b>
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>		
Asexual		5.5%
Bisexual		19.5%
Gay		4.3%
Heterosexual/Straight		43.9%
Lesbian		1.2%
Pansexual		7.3%
Queer		7.9%
Questioning or unsure		4.3%
Identity/Identities not listed		3.7%
Prefer not to answer		2.4%
<b>Student Life Experiences</b>		
Transfer student		54.8%
First generation college student		45.2%
Current or former foster youth		4.2%
International student		3.0%
Out-of-state student		9.6%
ESL (English as a Second Language student		4.2%
Veteran		4.2%
Immigrant to the U.S.		4.2%
DACA student		1.2%
Student athlete		1.2%
Parent of a child under 18 who lives with you		16.9%

**TABLE C2.** COVID Survey Student Characteristics

	<b>COVID Survey Student Sample Percentage</b>
<b>Student Status (n = 166)</b>	
Currently enrolled or will be enrolled in Fall 2020	85%
Graduated in Spring 2020	12%
No longer enrolled and no plans to enroll in Fall 2020	3%
<b>Full Time or Part Time Status (for current students only) (n = 141)</b>	
Full Time	69.5%
Part Time	30.5%
<b>Type of Degree (for current students only) (n = 141)</b>	
Bachelor's	70.9%
Graduate	27.6%
Post-Baccalaureate	1.4%