

Office of the President

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON BASIC NEEDS:

DISCUSSION ITEM

For Meeting of March 17, 2020

EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF FOOD AND HOUSING INSECURITY ON STUDENT OUTCOMES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The UC Systemwide Basic Needs Committee has partnered with the UC Office of the President (UCOP) to improve data collection on the condition of students' basic needs. In 2016, questions on food insecurity and homelessness were added to the UC's two major systemwide student surveys. As of 2020, we have information on academic outcomes for those survey respondents.

This item updates information presented at the March 2019 Special Committee on Basic Needs meeting, providing initial information on the relationship between food insecurity and homelessness and student engagement and performance. UCOP's Institutional Research & Academic Planning (IRAP) unit has produced a dashboard which shares this content, along with additional details by campus and student characteristics. We will share results from this dashboard at the March meeting of the Special Committee on Basic Needs meeting.

BACKGROUND

University of California (UC) students are highly committed to their education and work hard to earn their degree. However, students who face food insecurity and homelessness are managing increased levels of stress, which can impact their academic engagement and performance.¹

UC is institutionalizing the way it collects information on food and housing insecurity. The 2016 UC Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES) and Graduate Student Well-Being Survey (GSWB) included the following statements regarding food insecurity:

- *I was worried whether my food would run out before I got more*
- *The food that I bought just didn't last, and I didn't have money to get more*

Food insecurity was defined as an affirmative response to either or both. This item does not allow differentiation between low and very low food insecurity.

¹ Chris Fernandez, Jeff Webster, & Allyson Cornett. *Studying on Empty: A Qualitative Study of Low Food Security Among College Students*. Trellis Research Series, 2019.

These surveys also included the following question related to homelessness:

- *Since attending UC, have you ever been homeless for any of the following lengths of time (check all that apply)? (Homeless means not having stable or reliable housing, e.g., living on the street, in vehicles, motels, campgrounds, single-occupancy facilities, or couch surfing in other people's homes for temporary sleeping arrangements)*

The response categories included: 1) No; 2) Yes, during fall-spring academic year; 3) Yes, during summer when taking courses; 4) Yes, during summer when not taking courses; and 5) Yes, during winter break. Homelessness was defined as an affirmative response to any of the “Yes” options.

Responses to these items were used to identify undergraduate and graduate students who reported being food insecure and homeless. The responses of this population were compared to those of their peers who did not identify as experiencing food insecurity and homelessness on survey questions that assess their level of academic engagement, which can be associated with student performance. Undergraduate student outcome data was limited to one cohort or entering class. Gaps in first-year retention and timely graduation between students who reported being food insecure and homeless and their peers who did not are estimated for the fall 2015 entrants who completed the spring 2016 UCUES survey.

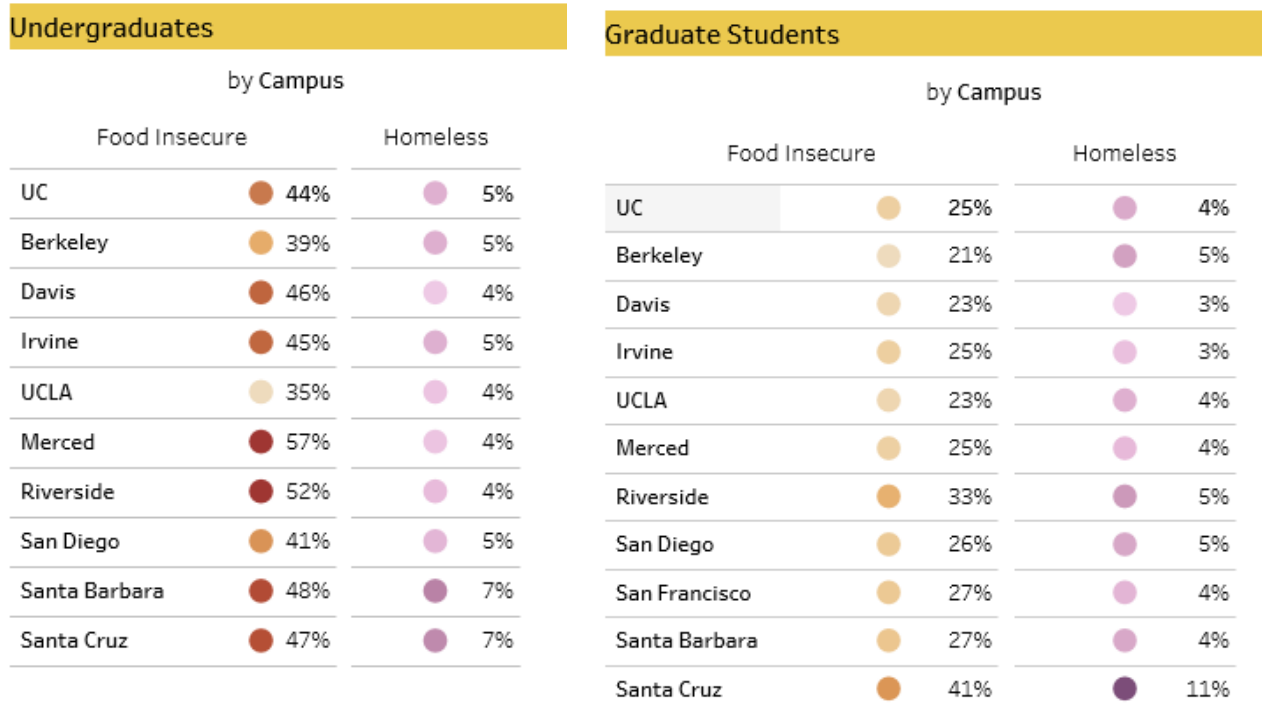
Results for graduate students are limited given their longer academic trajectory. While complete data is not yet available, responses from graduate students who reported being food insecure or homeless to questions about post-graduation career prospects and timely degree completion can be considered.

As campuses and different student subpopulations had different response rates to the surveys, weights were constructed to approximate equal representation of different subpopulations and minimize the impact of non-response bias. For undergraduate students, results were weighted by campus size, gender, ethnicity, and student level. For graduate students, results were weighted by campus size, gender, ethnicity, graduate level and major discipline.

Food insecurity and homelessness findings

Responses from the 2016 UCUES and GSWB surveys found 44 percent of undergraduate and 25 percent of graduate students reported food insecurity, and five percent of undergraduate and four percent of graduate students reported being homeless at some point in time since attending UC. Responses varied by campus, with higher proportions of undergraduates reporting food insecurity at UC Merced and UC Riverside, and higher proportions of both food insecurity and homelessness at UC Santa Barbara and UC Santa Cruz. For graduate students, a higher proportion reported both food insecurity and homelessness at UC Santa Cruz compared to the other UC campuses (see figure 1).

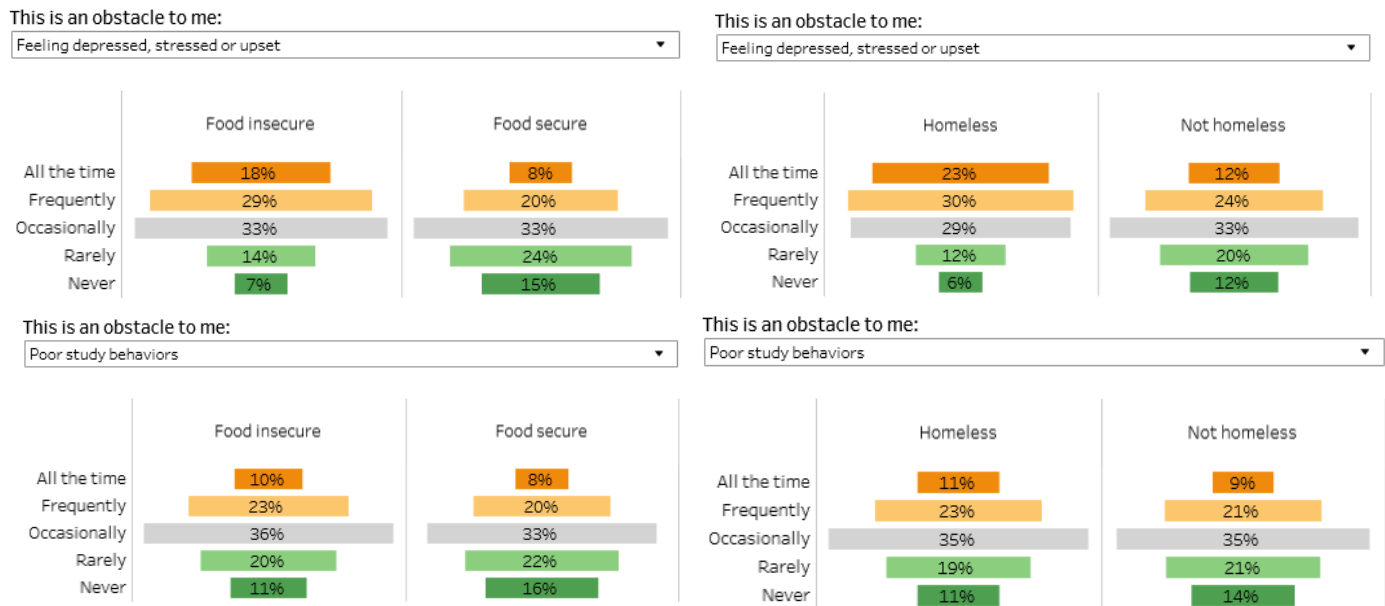
Figure 1: Percent of undergraduate and graduate students reporting food insecurity and homelessness by campus



Undergraduate and graduate student engagement levels

Undergraduates reporting food insecurity and homelessness cited “feeling depressed, stressed or upset” as a greater obstacle when compared to peers, with less difference in “poor study habits” (see figure 2).

Figure 2: Percent reporting “feeling depressed, stressed or upset” and “poor study behaviors” as an obstacle



Undergraduates who report food insecurity and homelessness are also more likely to report working 20 hours or more a week. Prior research has shown this level of work to be a point where GPAs can decline.

However, undergraduates who reported food insecurity and homelessness were just as likely, if not more likely, to be engaged with academic activities outside of class (see figure 3).

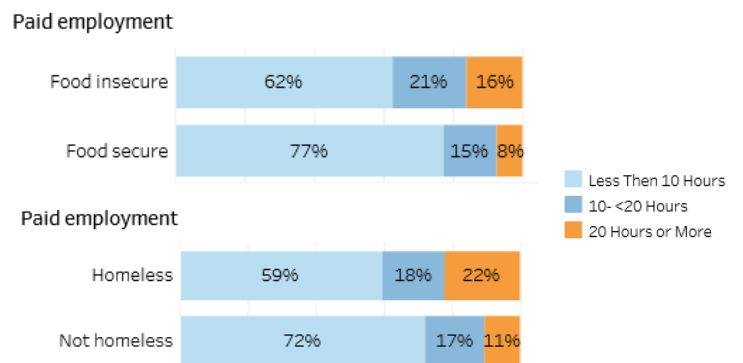
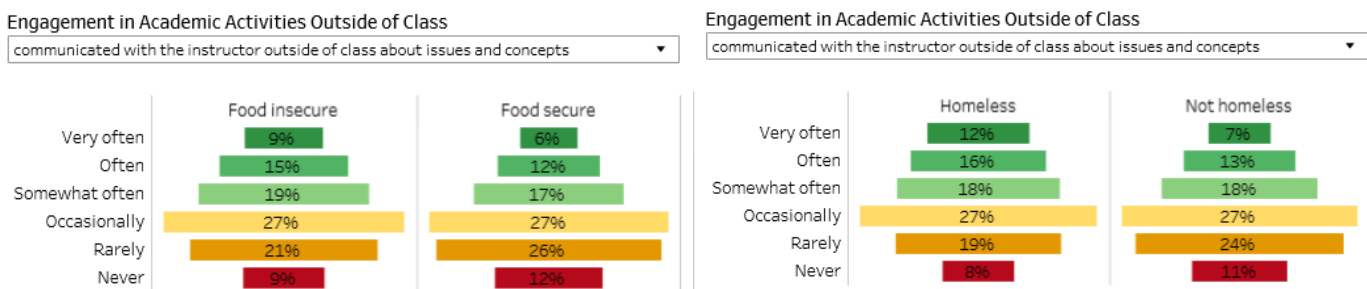


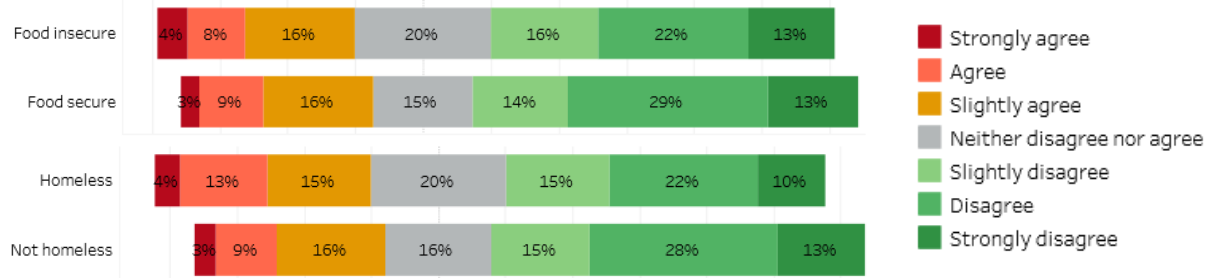
Figure 3: Percent reporting “communicating with an instructor outside of class about issues and concepts”



Graduate students who reported being food insecure or homeless also reported being less engaged by their day-to-day work than their peers (see figure 4).

Figure 4: Percent of graduate students reporting levels of “engagement with day-to-day work”

I am not very engaged by my day-to-day work.



Undergraduate and graduate student outcomes

IRAP has produced initial data on first-year continuation and timely graduation gaps between undergraduates who report food insecurity and homelessness to those who do not. This data illustrates if gaps exist systemwide, by campus and by undergraduate characteristics and can provide additional insight to inform campus efforts to advance UC 2030 goals, particularly related to improving timely graduation rates.

Undergraduates who report food insecurity are about as likely as those who are food secure to continue after their first year. However, undergraduates who are food insecure are much less likely to graduate on time, with a eight point gap for four-year graduation rates for freshmen and a five point gap for two-year graduation rates for transfer students when compared to peers (see figure 5).

Figure 5: Gap in first-year persistence and timely graduation rates for food insecure undergraduates



Undergraduates who report homelessness are less likely to return after their first year, with around a four point gap for freshman entrants and a three point gap for transfer entrants when compared to their peers. That gap increases to six points for four-year graduation rates when comparing freshman who report homelessness to those who do not. The gap significantly widens for transfer students to 15 points in two-year graduation rates as compared to their peers (see figure 6).

Figure 6: Gap in first-year persistence and timely graduation rates for homeless undergraduates

1st Year Persistence Rate: Spring 2016 UCUES respondents who enrolled in fall 2016
 Shown as gap from: Not homeless

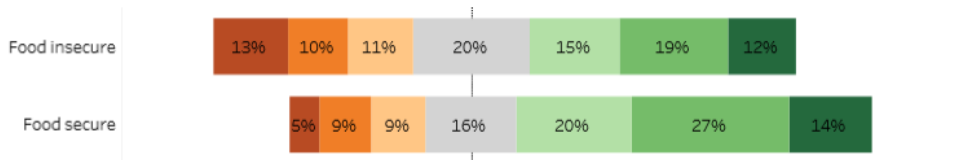
Graduation rate: Spring 2016 UCUES respondents who graduated by spring 2019 for freshmen (within 4 years at UC) or by spring 2017 for transfers (within 2 years at UC)
 Shown as gap from: Not homeless



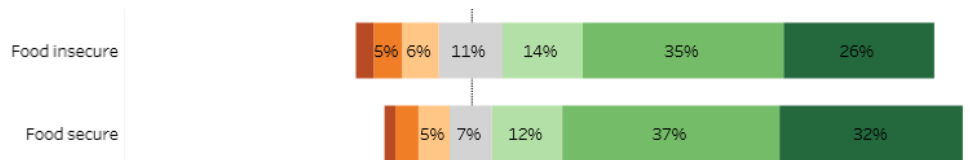
As with undergraduate students, graduate students who report food insecurity and homelessness are less likely to report that they are on-track to complete their degree program on time and even less likely to report they are upbeat about their “post-graduation career prospects” (see figure 7).

Figure 7: Responses to post-graduate career prospects and being on track to complete a degree on time based on food security and homeless responses

I'm upbeat about my post-graduation career prospects.

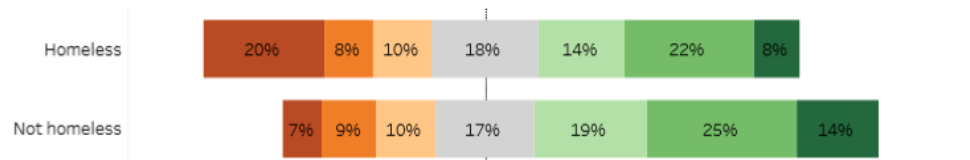


I'm on track to complete my degree program on time.

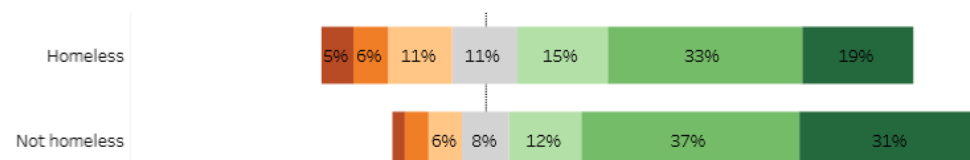


Strongly disagree
 Disagree
 Slightly disagree
 Neither disagree nor agree
 Slightly agree
 Agree
 Strongly agree

I'm upbeat about my post-graduation career prospects.



I'm on track to complete my degree program on time.



These results paint an initial picture of the impact of food insecurity and homelessness on student success that will grow clearer as more years of data are gathered, with further augmentation of systemwide survey instruments. This year, UCOP will be adding housing insecurity questions developed by the UC Systemwide Basic Needs Committee to the UCUES and Graduate Student

Cost of Attendance survey instruments to collect more reliable and accurate data on student housing insecurity.

Key to Acronyms

GSWB	Graduate Student Well-Being
IRAP	Institutional Research and Academic Planning
UCOP	UC Office of the President
UCUES	UC Undergraduate Experience Survey