



For College, Community, and Justice

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

## REPORT FOR SAN DIEGO MESA COLLEGE

A Hope Center Publication  
March 2021

## 2020 #REALCOLLEGE SURVEY RESULTS

### INSTITUTION REPORT FOR SAN DIEGO MESA COLLEGE

Prepared by  
The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice  
at Temple University

March 2021

#### OVERVIEW

Invitations to complete the questionnaire were sent by email to 21,087 students from San Diego Mesa College and 3,697 students participated. Thus, the estimated response rate is 17.5%.

#### Students at San Diego Mesa College told us that...

- 68% experienced at least one form of basic needs insecurity, including
  - 43% who experienced food insecurity in the prior 30 days,
  - 59% who experienced housing insecurity in the previous year, and
  - 17% who experienced homelessness in the previous year.

#### We also learned that...

- 44% had a close friend or family member who was sick with COVID-19, while 7% were sick with COVID-19 themselves.
- 41% of students exhibited at least moderate anxiety.
- 13% of students who experienced basic needs insecurity used emergency aid, but 42% had not heard of emergency aid programs on campus.
- 55% of students experiencing basic needs insecurity did not apply for campus supports because they did not know how.
- 54% of students experiencing basic needs insecurity received some form of public assistance.

*For more information on the research methodology and survey participants, please refer to the online appendices for the #RealCollege 2021: Basic Needs Insecurity During the Ongoing Pandemic report (available at [www.hope4college.com](http://www.hope4college.com)).*

## NEW ECONOMICS OF COLLEGE DURING THE PANDEMIC

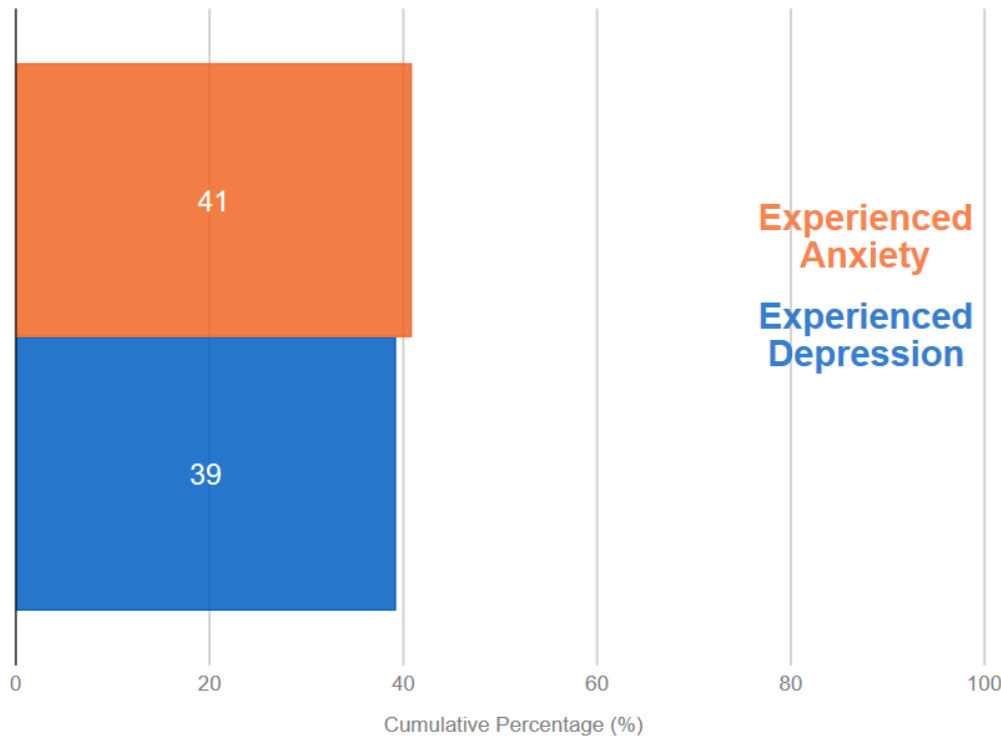
Students and families have struggled with the new economics of college for the past 20 years. Stagnant incomes, declining state support for higher education, college prices that stretch the budgets of all but the top earners, rising wealth and income inequality, and a threadbare social safety net have made a college degree less attainable.

In 2020, a pandemic-induced recession exacerbated these issues. This section explores how the pandemic affected students, looking at three areas: health, employment, and families.

### HEALTH

As COVID-19 cases in the U.S. increased throughout the spring and fall of 2020, students' health suffered. Approximately 41% of students at San Diego Mesa College reported experiencing at least moderate anxiety, while 39% reported experiencing at least moderate depression.

**FIGURE 1. PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION AT SAN DIEGO MESA COLLEGE**

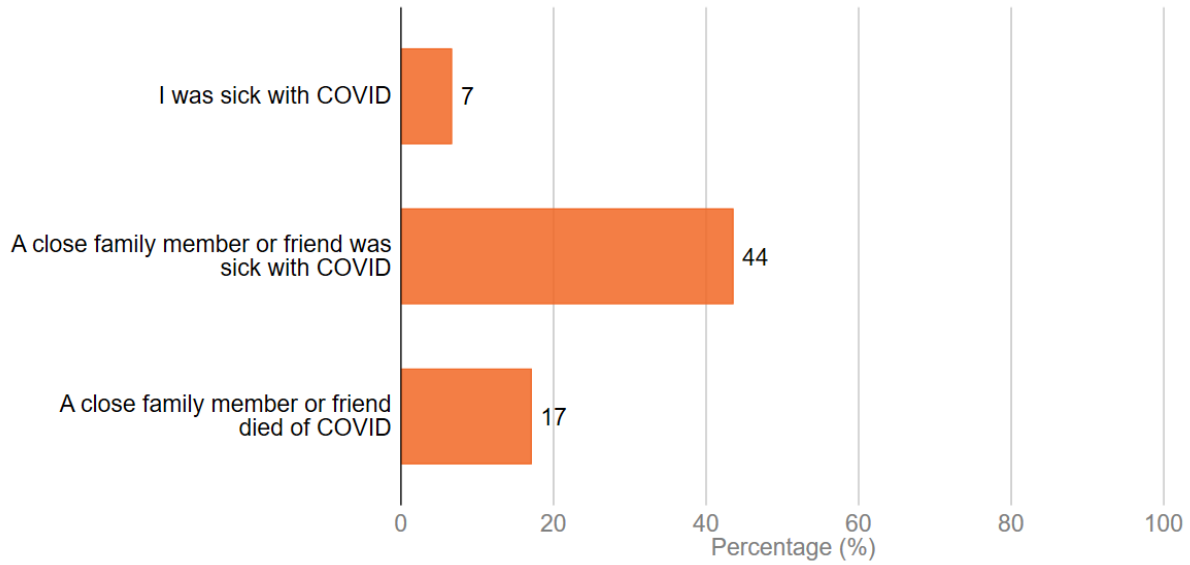


Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Students “experienced anxiety” if they experienced moderate to severe levels of anxiety in the last two weeks; while students “experienced depression” if they experienced moderate, moderately severe, or severe levels of depression in the last two weeks. For more details on measures of anxiety and depression used in this report refer to the online appendices for the #RealCollege 2021 report. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Personal experiences with COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus, were also common. At San Diego Mesa College, 44% of students had a close friend or family member who was sick with COVID-19, while 7% were sick with COVID-19 themselves.

**FIGURE 2. PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH COVID-19 AT SAN DIEGO MESA COLLEGE**



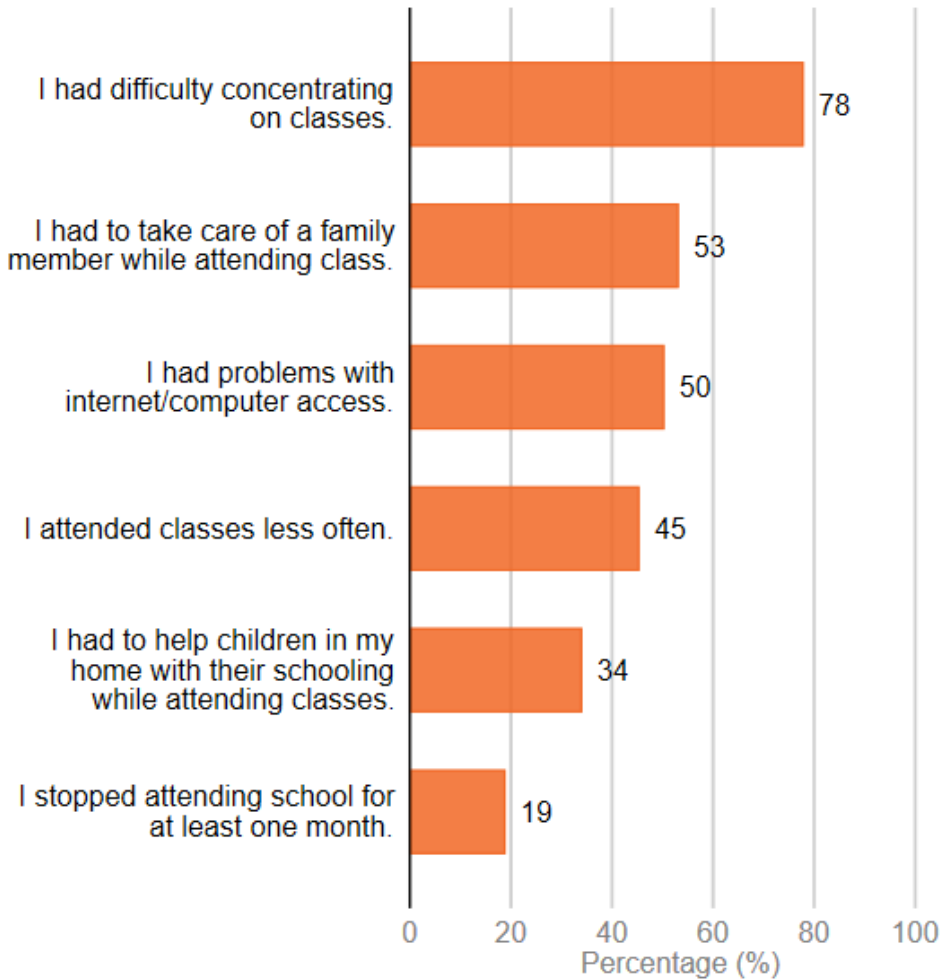
Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Some students may have more than one personal experience with COVID-19. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.



Students at San Diego Mesa College reported numerous challenges when asked to reflect on their experiences during the pandemic. As Figure 3 shows, 78% had difficulty concentrating in classes and 50% had problems with internet or computer access since the spring of 2020.

**FIGURE 3. OTHER CHALLENGES FACED SINCE SPRING 2020 DUE TO THE PANDEMIC AT SAN DIEGO MESA COLLEGE**



Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Results above are limited to students who were also enrolled in college in spring 2020. Some students may have experienced more than one of the challenges listed above. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.

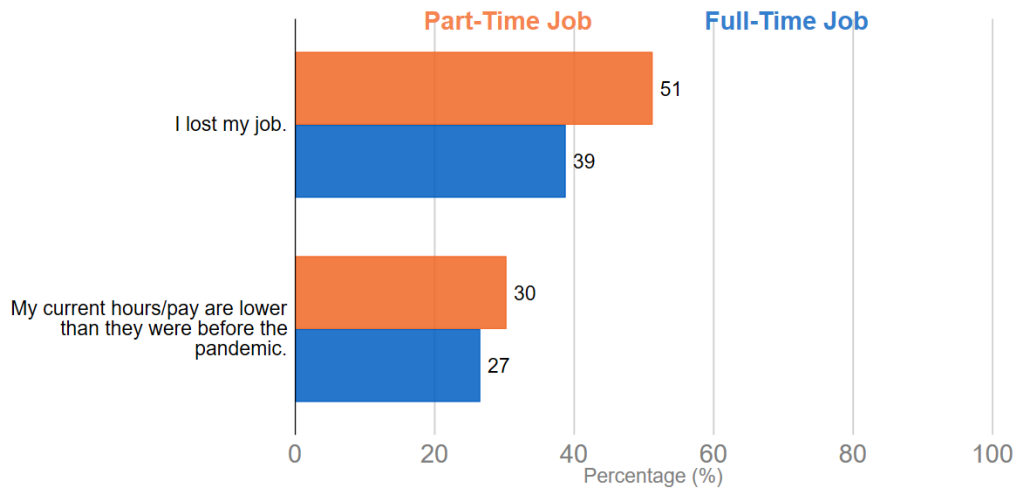


## EMPLOYMENT

The pandemic shuttered businesses and led to widespread furloughs, layoffs, and reductions in hours and pay. While the causes for job losses among college students are complex, campus closures, the loss of work-study opportunities, and job losses in the leisure and hospitality sector—in which younger, economically disadvantaged students are likely to work—certainly contributed.

Figure 4 shows that 51% of students with part-time jobs at San Diego Mesa College lost their jobs.

**FIGURE 4. JOB LOSS OR REDUCTION IN PAY OR HOURS, BY PRE-PANDEMIC JOB STATUS AT SAN DIEGO MESA COLLEGE**



Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

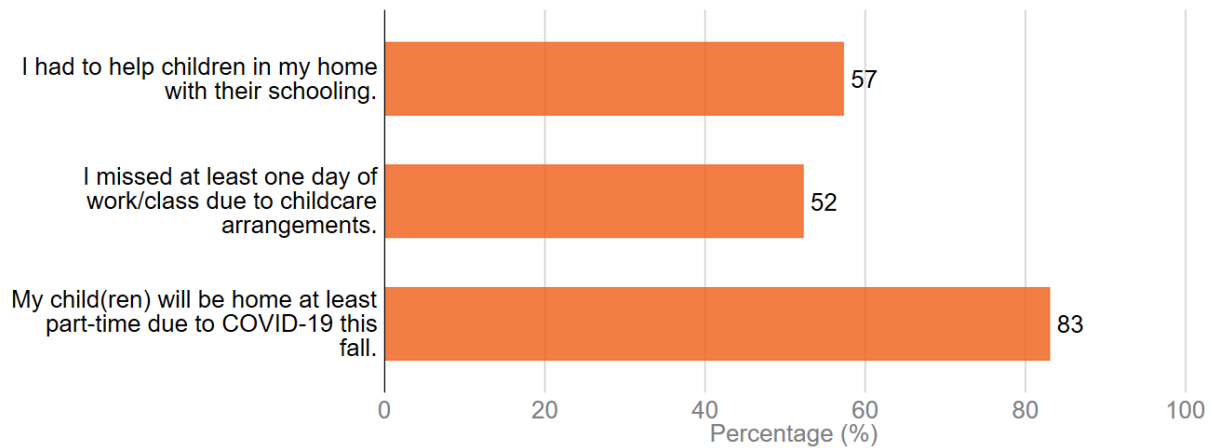
Notes: Results above are limited to students who were also enrolled in college in spring 2020 and had at least one job before the pandemic. Those with a full-time job worked more than 20 hours a week, whereas those with a part-time job worked 20 hours or less a week. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.



## FAMILIES

As the pandemic continued, schools and daycare centers closed. As a result, many parents—especially mothers—spent more time on childcare. When asked about their experiences during the spring 2020 term, 57% of parenting students at San Diego Mesa College reported helping their children with schooling while attending classes and 52% missed work or class due to childcare arrangements. During the fall 2020 term, 83% had children home from school at least part-time (Figure 5).

**FIGURE 5. CHALLENGES FACED BY PARENTING STUDENTS DUE TO THE PANDEMIC AT SAN DIEGO MESA COLLEGE**



Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Results to questions about spring 2020 term are limited to students who were enrolled in that term. A parenting student is a parent, primary caregiver, or guardian (legal or informal) of any children in or outside their household. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.



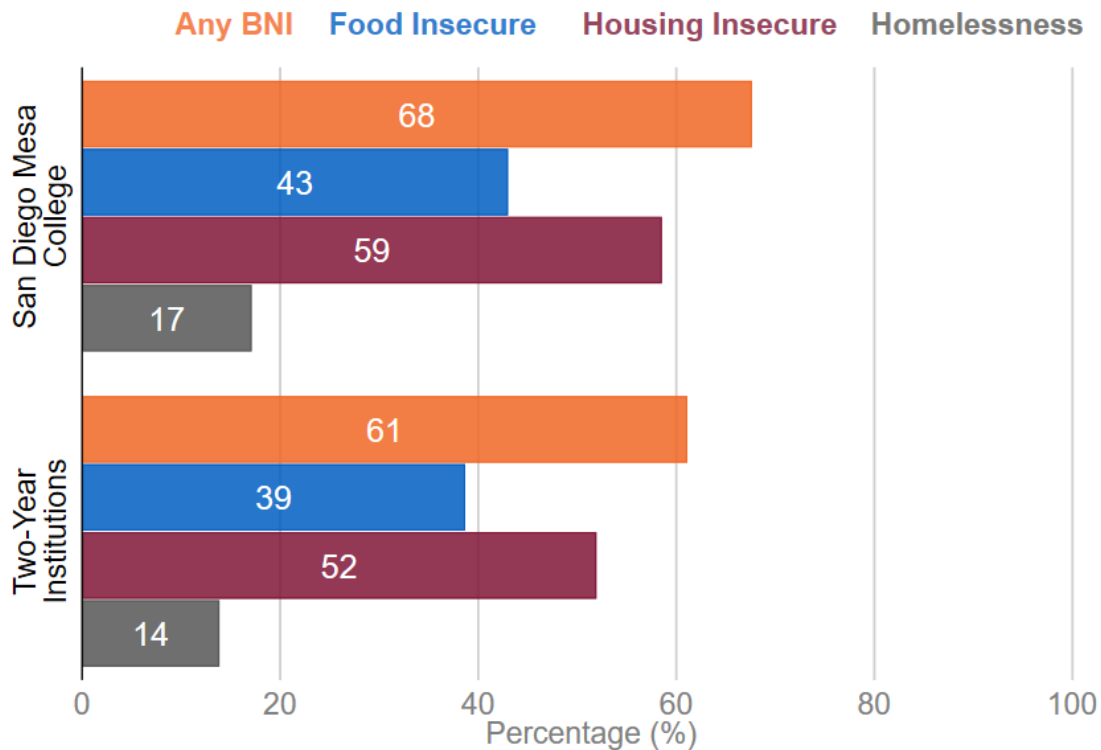
## BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY DURING THE PANDEMIC

Going into the fall 2020 term, it was unclear how students’ rates of basic needs insecurity (BNI) would be affected by the pandemic. Students faced a myriad of challenges, including rising unemployment and campus closures, that could increase their basic needs insecurity.

Students experiencing any basic needs insecurity includes those who experienced food insecurity, housing insecurity, or homelessness. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was created, refer to the web appendices in our #RealCollege 2021 report.

Among survey respondents at San Diego Mesa College, 68% of students experienced some form of basic needs insecurity (Figure 6).

**FIGURE 6. COMPARISON OF BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY RATES**



Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: “Any BNI” includes students who experienced food insecurity, housing insecurity, or homelessness within the last year. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was created, refer to the online appendices for the #RealCollege 2021 report. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.



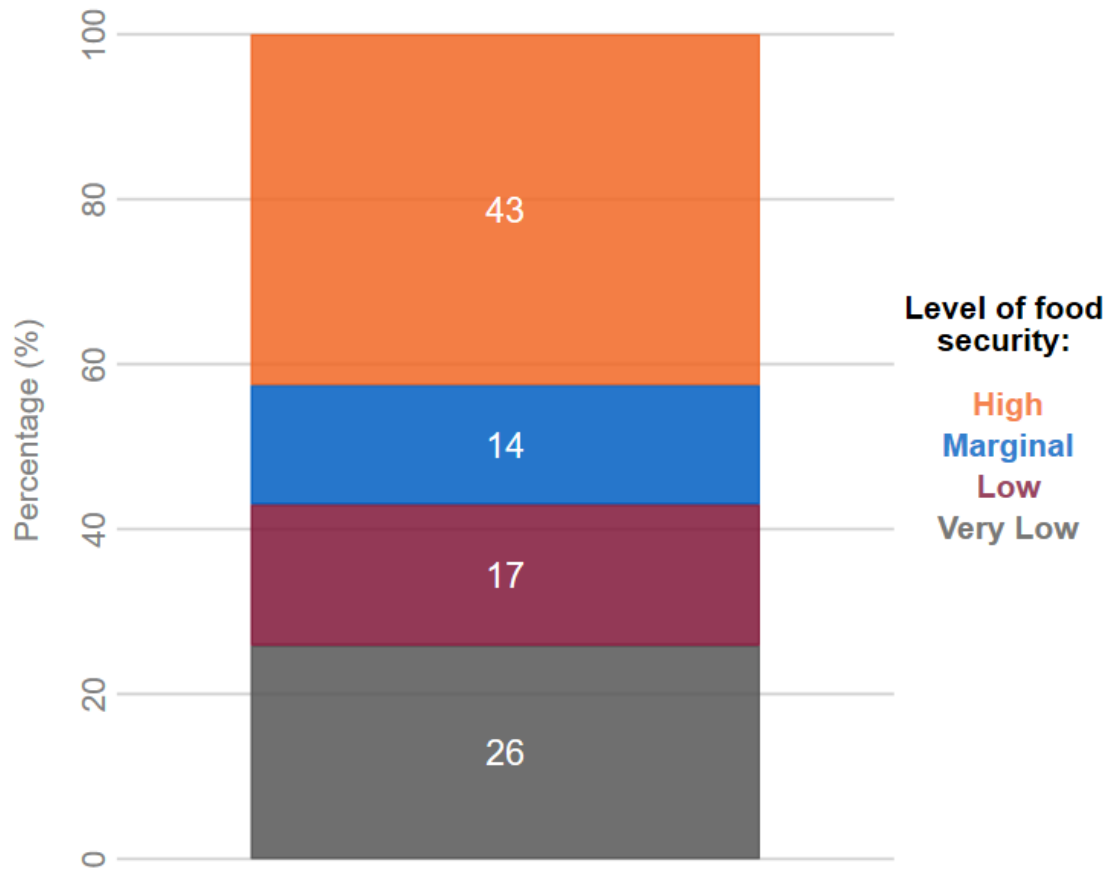
## FOOD INSECURITY

Food insecurity is the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe food, or the ability to acquire such food in a socially acceptable manner. The most extreme form is often accompanied by physiological sensations of hunger. We assessed food security among students using the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) 18-item set of questions.

During the 30 days preceding the survey, approximately 43% of survey respondents at San Diego Mesa College experienced low or very low levels of food security (Figure 7).

Moreover, 45% of survey respondents could not afford to eat balanced meals and 49% worried about running out of food before they had money to buy more (Figure 8).

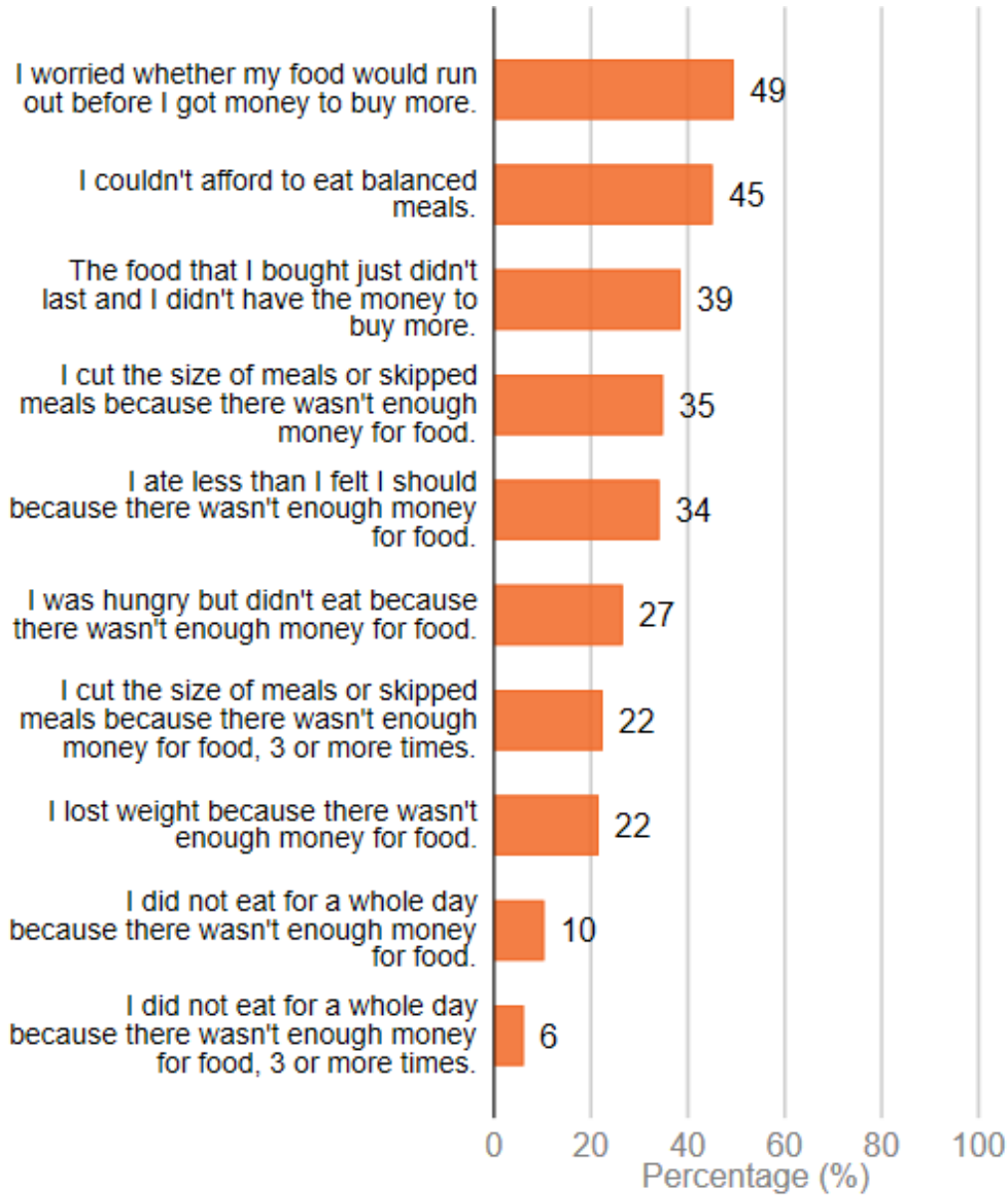
**FIGURE 7. LEVEL OF FOOD SECURITY AMONG SURVEY RESPONDENTS AT SAN DIEGO MESA COLLEGE**



Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: According to the USDA, students at either low or very low food security are termed "food insecure." Cumulative percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding. For more details on the food security module used in this report, refer to the online appendices for the #RealCollege 2021 report.

**FIGURE 8. FOOD SECURITY QUESTIONS AMONG SURVEY RESPONDENTS AT SAN DIEGO MESA COLLEGE**



Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

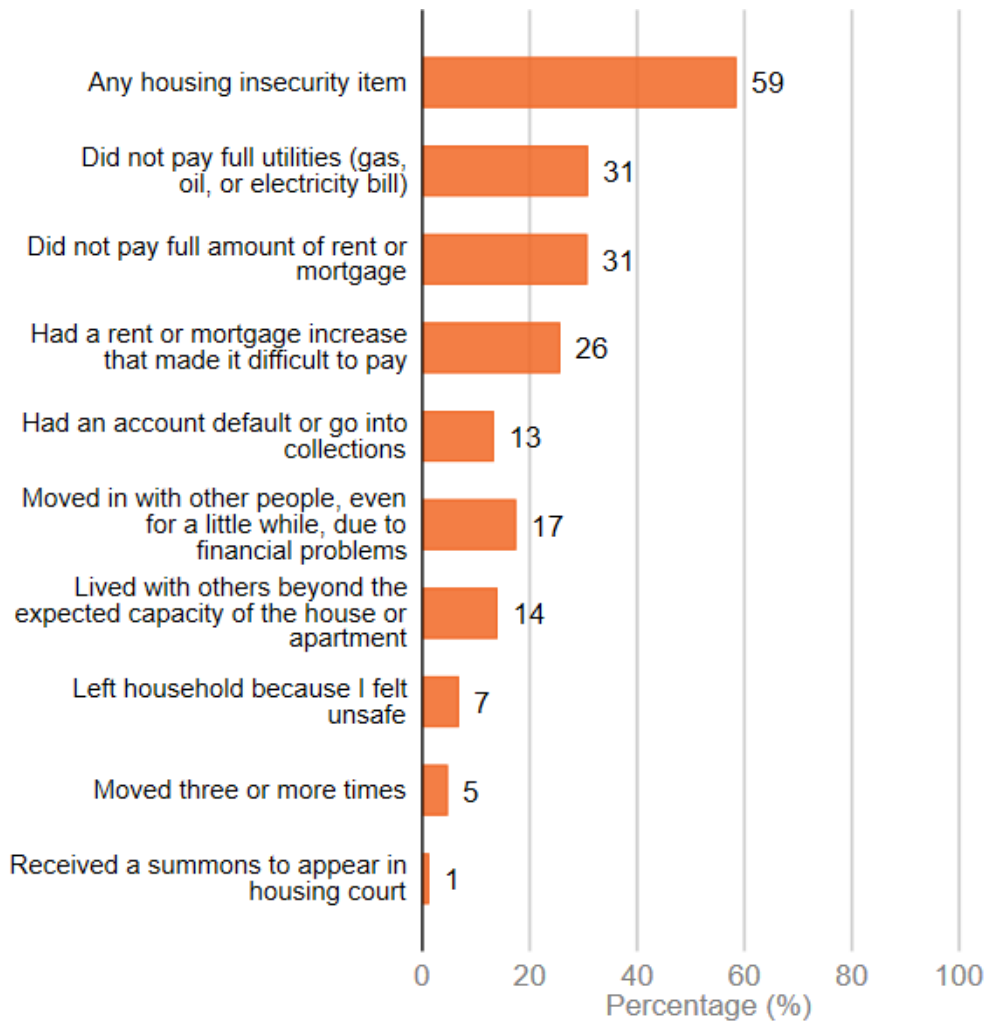
Notes: Some students may have experienced more than one of the circumstances listed above. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.

## HOUSING INSECURITY

Housing insecurity encompasses a broad set of challenges that prevent someone from having a safe, affordable, and consistent place to live. The 2020 #RealCollege Survey measured housing insecurity using a nine-item set of questions developed by our team at the Hope Center. It looks at factors such as the ability to pay rent and the need to move frequently in the previous year.

How prevalent is housing insecurity at San Diego Mesa College? As displayed below, 59% of survey respondents experienced housing insecurity (Figure 9).

**FIGURE 9. HOUSING INSECURITY AMONG SURVEY RESPONDENTS AT SAN DIEGO MESA COLLEGE**



Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

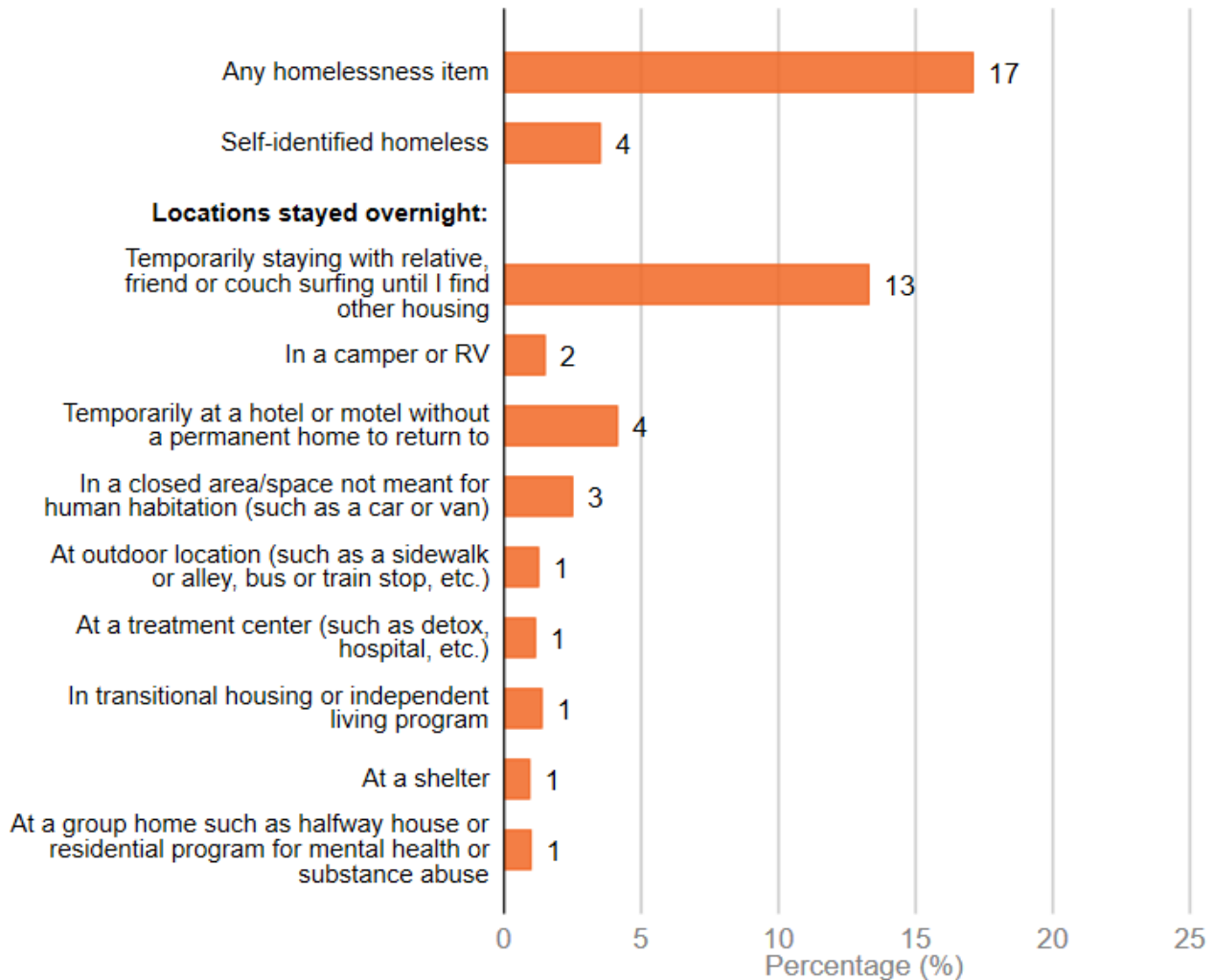
Notes: Some students may have experienced more than one of the circumstances listed above. For more details on how we measure housing insecurity, refer to the online appendices of the #RealCollege 2021 report. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.

## HOMELESSNESS

In alignment with the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance-Act, students are considered homeless if they identified as experiencing homelessness or signs of homelessness (for instance, living in a shelter, temporarily with a relative, or in a space not meant for human habitation). We use this inclusive definition of homelessness because students who are experiencing homelessness and signs of homelessness face comparable challenges.

In the 12 months prior to the survey, 17% of survey respondents at San Diego Mesa College reported experiencing homelessness or the conditions of homelessness (Figure 10).

**FIGURE 10. EXPERIENCES WITH HOMELESSNESS AMONG SURVEY RESPONDENTS AT SAN DIEGO MESA COLLEGE**



Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

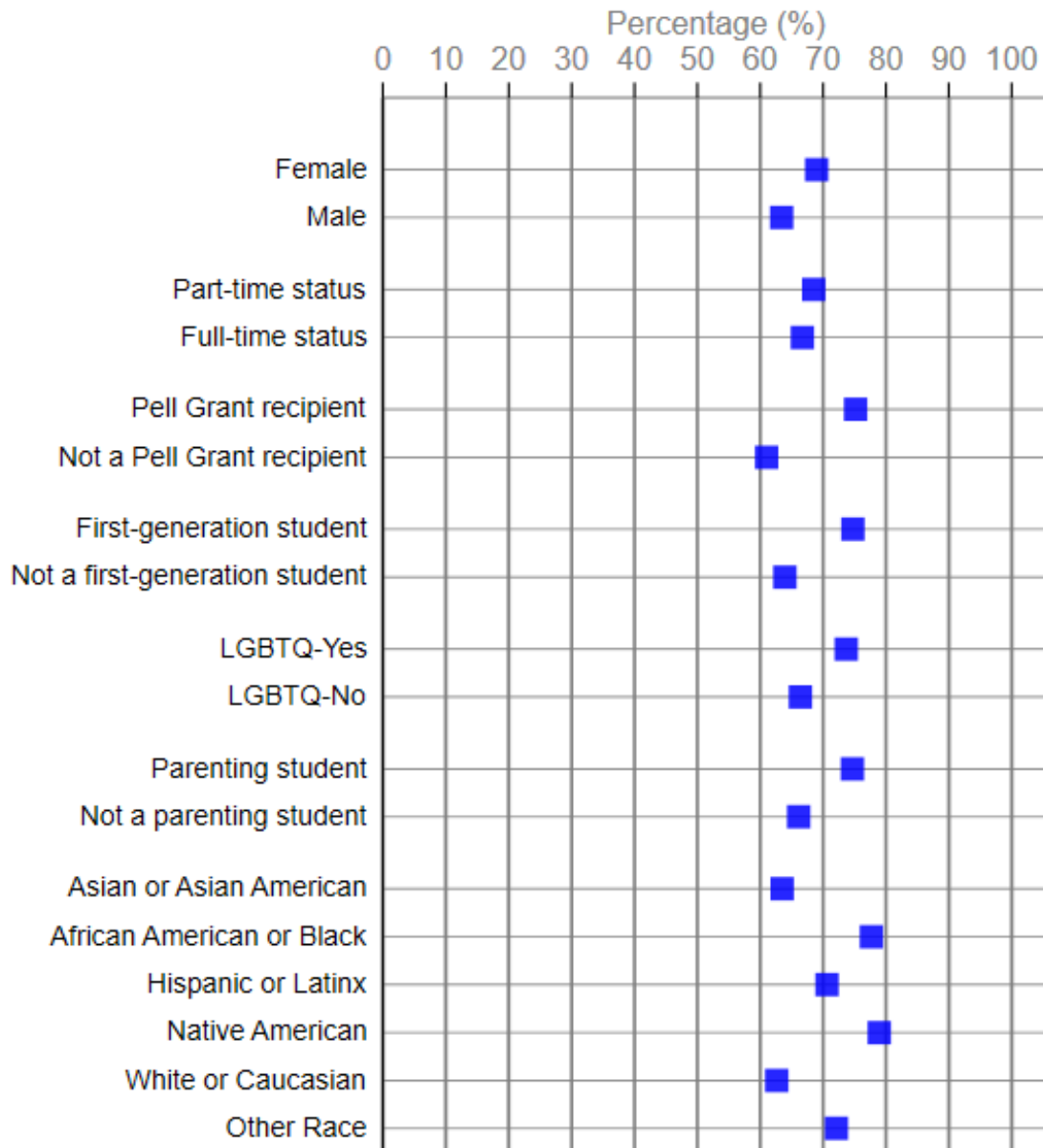
Notes: Some students may have experienced more than one of the circumstances listed above. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.

## DISPARITIES IN BASIC NEEDS INSECURITIES

Some students are at higher risk of basic needs insecurity.

Figure 11 shows disparities in rates of experiencing any form of basic needs insecurity according to students' demographic, academic, and economic circumstances, as well as other life circumstances.

**FIGURE 11. DISPARITIES IN BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY AT SAN DIEGO MESA COLLEGE**



Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Classifications of gender identity and racial/ethnic background are not mutually exclusive. Students could self-identify with multiple classifications. First-generation students are defined as students whose parents' highest level of education completed is a high school diploma or GED. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.



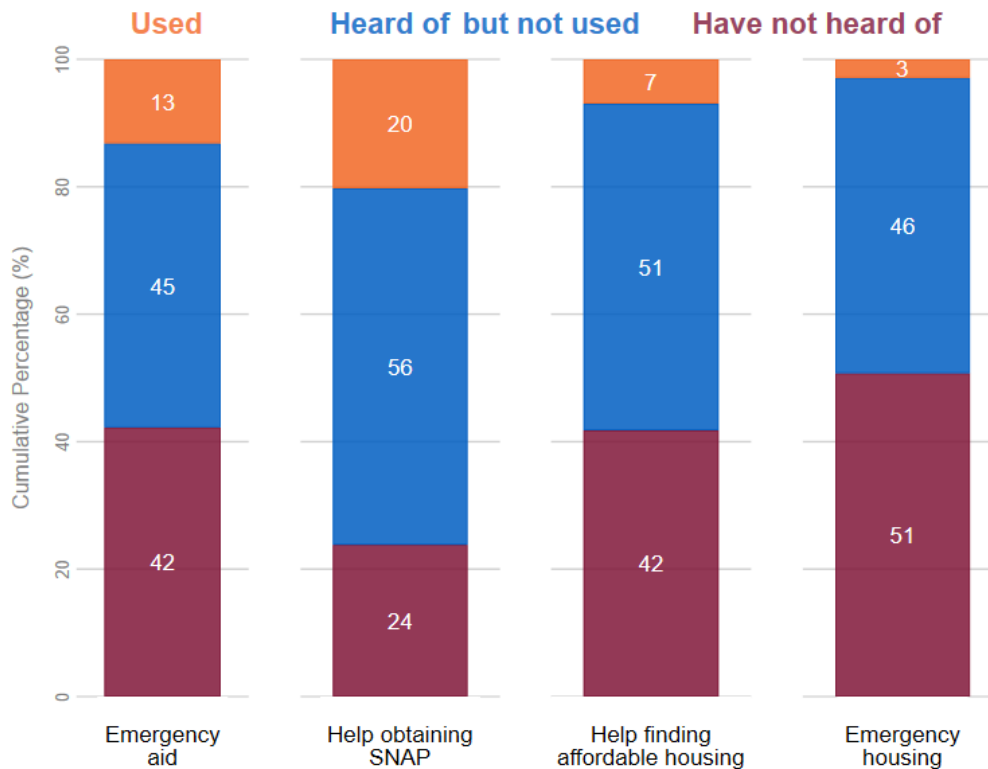
## UTILIZATION OF SUPPORTS

In late March 2020, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act became law. The bill offered students and colleges financial relief, particularly in the form of emergency aid. Nevertheless, students who were claimed as dependents were ineligible for CARES stimulus checks, even if they earned income and filed a tax return. In addition, there was considerable confusion over CARES Act eligibility requirements, and in April and May 2020, few students reported accessing available CARES supports. This section examines supports available to students and the utilization of these supports in the fall 2020 term.

## CAMPUS SUPPORTS

Among students experiencing basic needs insecurity at San Diego Mesa College, utilization of campus supports was generally uncommon. Only 13% of students experiencing basic needs insecurity used emergency financial aid and 20% received help in obtaining SNAP benefits (Figure 12).

**FIGURE 12. USE OF CAMPUS SUPPORTS AMONG STUDENTS WHO EXPERIENCED BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY AT SAN DIEGO MESA COLLEGE**

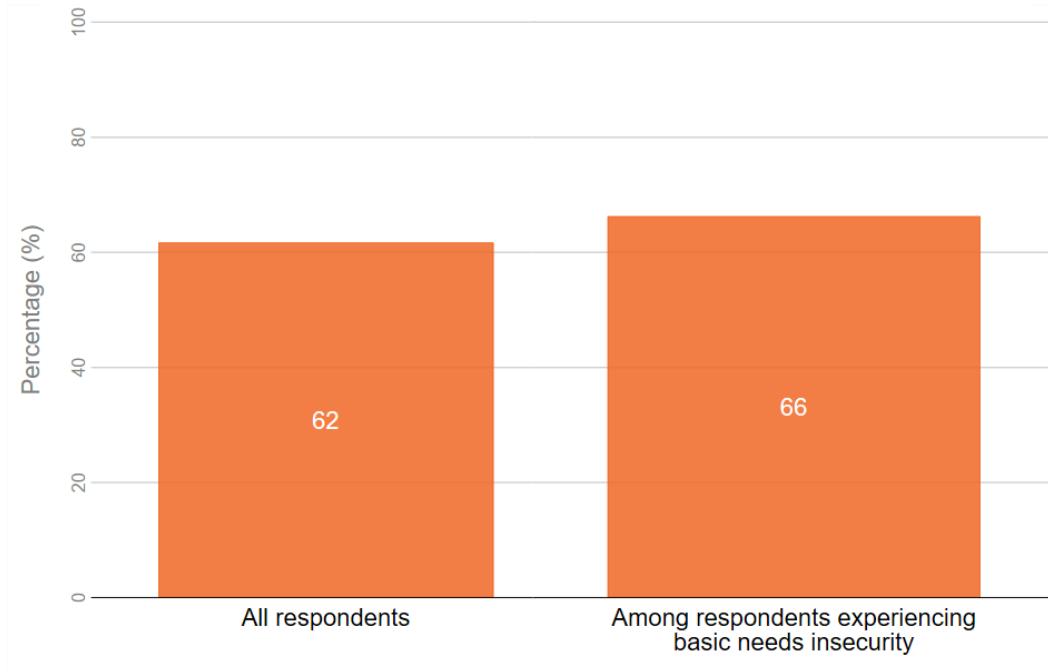


Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Some students may have used or heard of multiple campus supports. Cumulative percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Seeking emergency aid, however, was stressful for some students. Among those who applied for emergency aid, including CARES Act grants, 66% indicated that their experience was stressful (Figure 13).

**FIGURE 13. STRESS WHEN SEEKING EMERGENCY AID, BY BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY STATUS AT SAN DIEGO MESA COLLEGE**



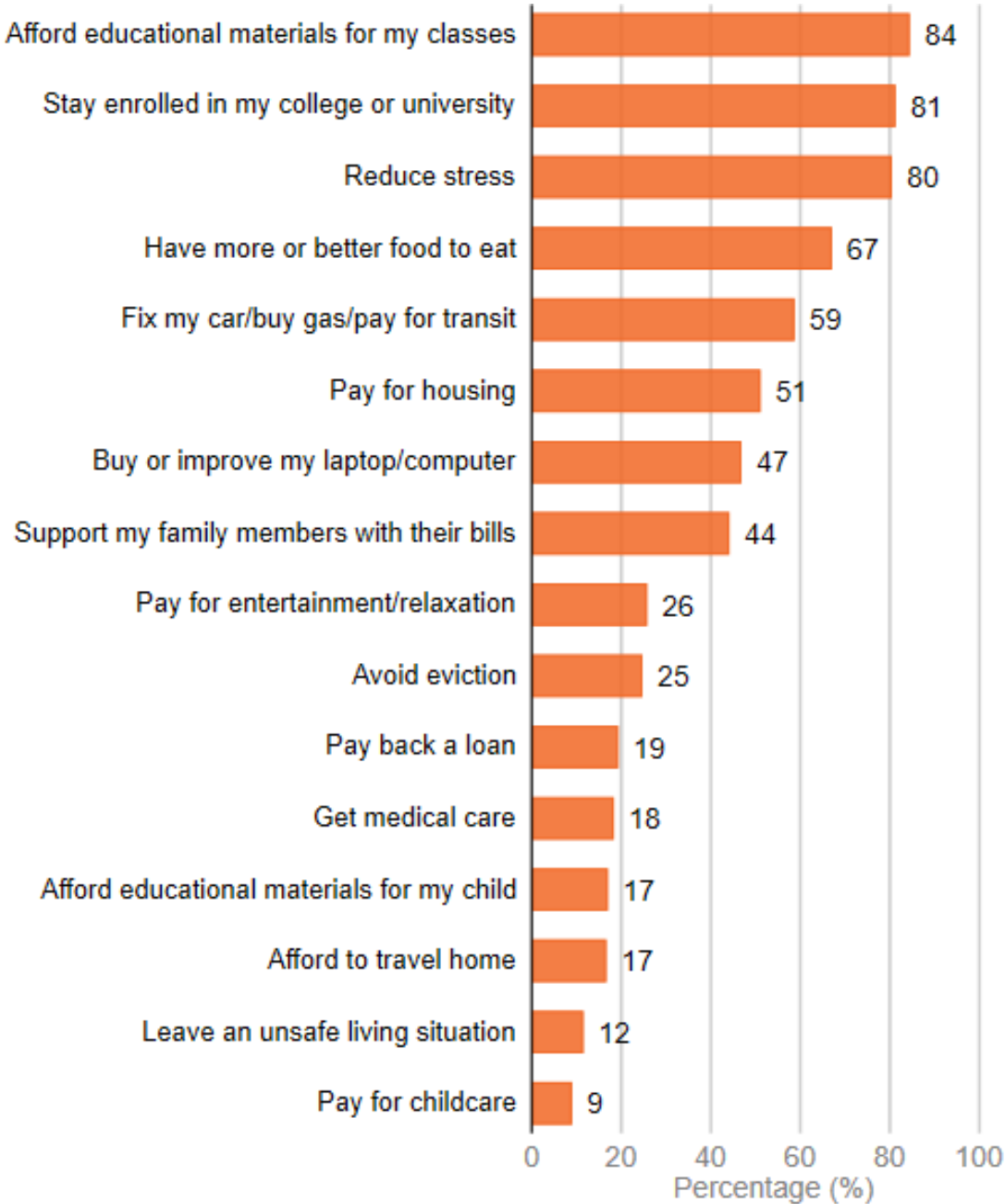
Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Rates above are among students who applied for CARES or non-CARES emergency aid funding this year. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.



For students who did receive emergency aid, the extra, flexible funds were critical. Many students at San Diego Mesa College used funds to stay enrolled, afford educational materials, and reduce stress (Figure 14).

**FIGURE 14. TOP USES OF EMERGENCY AID FUNDING AT SAN DIEGO MESA COLLEGE**

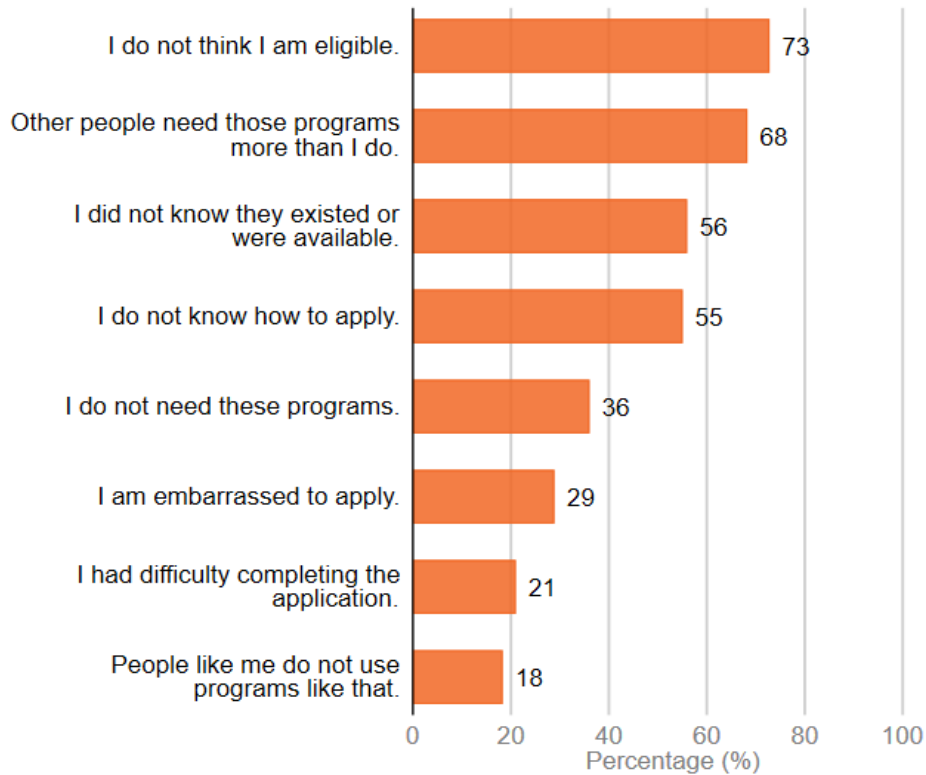


Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Rates above are among students who received CARES or non-CARES emergency aid funding. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Among those students who did not seek out campus supports, 55% did not know how to apply and 68% thought other students needed the resources more (Figure 16).

**FIGURE 15. REASONS WHY STUDENTS EXPERIENCING BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY DID NOT USE CAMPUS SUPPORTS AT SAN DIEGO MESA COLLEGE**

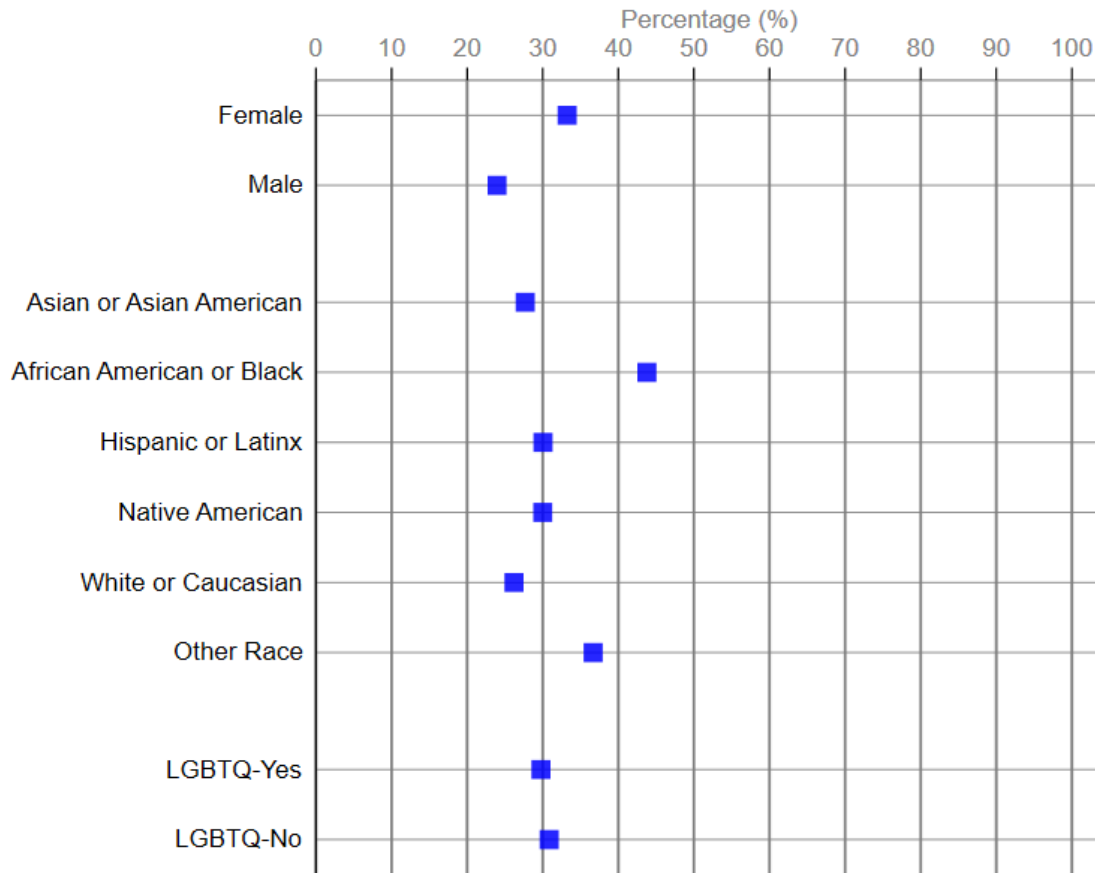


Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Some students may have reported multiple reasons for why they did not use campus supports. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Issues like administrative burden, stigma, and shame can cause inequitable access to campus supports. Figure 16 shows gaps in the use of campus supports.

**FIGURE 16. GAPS IN THE USE OF CAMPUS SUPPORTS AMONG STUDENTS AT SAN DIEGO MESA COLLEGE WHO EXPERIENCED ANY BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY**



Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Classifications of gender identity and racial/ethnic background are not mutually exclusive. Students could self-identify with multiple classifications. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.

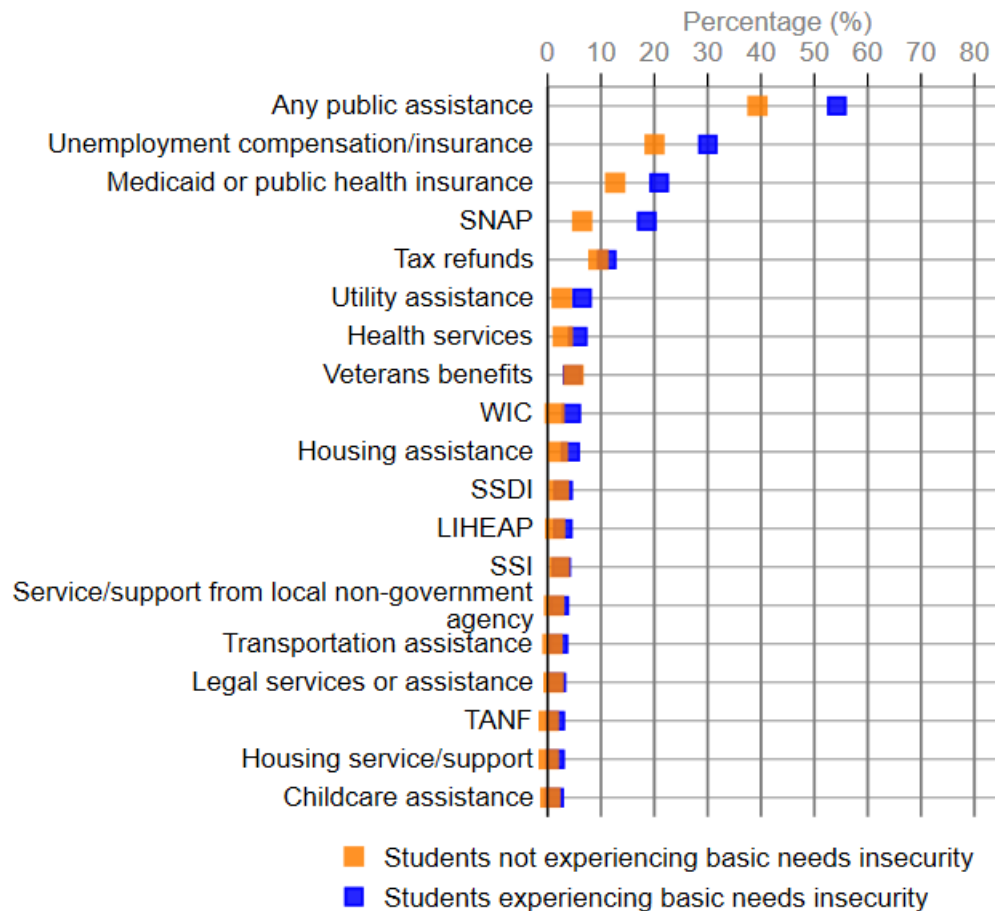


## PUBLIC BENEFITS

Broadly, public benefits ensure people experiencing financial hardship can cover their basic needs—they are a government-provided “safety net.” For example, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program provides a minimal amount of cash assistance to families with the lowest incomes. Similarly, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is meant for workers with the lowest incomes. To qualify for SNAP, students must meet income and asset criteria.

Among 2020 #RealCollege Survey respondents who were experiencing basic needs insecurity, 54% received some form of public assistance in the 12 months preceding the survey (Figure 17).

**FIGURE 17. USE OF PUBLIC BENEFITS, BY BASIC NEEDS SECURITY STATUS AT SAN DIEGO MESA COLLEGE**



Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: SNAP = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, WIC = nutritional assistance for pregnant women and children, TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, SSI = supplemental security income, SSDI = social security disability income, and LIHEAP = Low Income Housing Energy Assistance Program. Health services include income-based health services. Housing assistance includes services such as housing choice vouchers, subsidized site-based housing, public- or nonprofit owned housing, income-based housing or rent, and rental or homeowners assistance. Veterans benefits include Veterans Affairs benefits for a service member's, widow's, or survivor's pension; service disability; or the GI Bill. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While vaccines offer hope for fall 2021, the impact of the pandemic will reverberate for years. Providing students the supports they need—including for their basic needs—is the best way to ensure they can complete degrees. Colleges and universities can directly support students in a number of ways, including creating new or expanding existing emergency aid programs, discussing basic needs during enrollment, and increasing student awareness of available supports. By providing students with information about existing supports from day one, they will feel more empowered to seek support when and if they need it.

## ABOUT US

The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice is redefining what it means to be a student-ready college with a national movement centering #RealCollege students' basic needs. In order to advance the necessary systemic changes to support those needs, our work includes four pillars: action research, engagement and communication, advocacy, and sustainability. For more information, visit [www.hope4college.com](http://www.hope4college.com).

## CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions about this report, please contact the Hope Center research team at [hopesrvy@temple.edu](mailto:hopesrvy@temple.edu).



## APPENDIX

### TABLE A. CHARACTERISTICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS AT SAN DIEGO MESA COLLEGE

		NUMBER OF STUDENTS	PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS
GENDER IDENTITY	Male	869	29
	Female	2,061	69
	Valid Responses	2,992	100
SEXUAL ORIENTATION	Is LGBTQ	571	19
	Is not LGBTQ	2,459	81
	Valid Responses	3,030	100
RACE & ETHNICITY	Asian or Asian American	660	22
	African American or Black	300	10
	Hispanic or Latinx	1,236	42
	Native American	114	4
	White or Caucasian	1,105	37
	Other	208	7
	Valid Responses	2,978	100
AGE	18 to 20	944	32
	21 to 25	820	28
	26 and older	1,179	40
	Valid Responses	2,948	100
ENROLLMENT STATUS	Full-time	1,539	44
	Part-time	1,972	56
	Valid Responses	3,511	100
YEARS IN COLLEGE	Less than 1	751	21
	1 to 2	1,163	32
	3 or more	1,681	47
	Valid Responses	3,595	100
RECEIVES PELL GRANT	Yes	1,555	46
	No	1,819	54
	Valid Responses	3,374	100

Notes: Classifications of gender identity and racial/ethnic background are not mutually exclusive. Students could self-identify with multiple classifications.