

STUDENT FOOD AND HOUSING INSECURITY

WORK GROUP REPORT



ARIZONA BOARD OF
REGENTS

ASU ♦ NAU ♦ UA



ABOUT THIS REPORT

Increasingly, food and housing insecurity is becoming a challenge for more college students nationwide. Food and housing insecurity can potentially impact a student's academic performance, and the physical and mental health of those who struggle. A [recent survey](#) found that nearly 40 percent of students at two- or four-year schools had experienced food insecurity in the last 30 days. The pandemic has only exacerbated the problem. Students at Arizona's public universities are not immune to these challenges.

An Arizona Board of Regents work group was developed and charged with assessing the scope of student food insecurity issues and housing needs while also providing guidance on evidence-based policies and practices to alleviate these needs. In response, surveys were conducted at Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University and the University of Arizona to assess student experiences as it relates to basic needs with a focus on food and housing insecurity.

This report summarizes the survey administration method, university-level key findings, and recommendations and conclusions from the work group.

ABOUT THE ARIZONA BOARD OF REGENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Arizona's level of educational attainment – the percentage of adults who earn a two- or four-year degree – trails the national average. Increasing educational attainment is a board priority as individuals with a degree not only command higher salaries but also drive the prosperity of our state's economy.

Many issues impact higher levels of educational attainment, including student food and housing insecurity.

Increasingly, food and housing insecurity is becoming a challenge for more college students nationwide. Food and housing insecurity can potentially impact a student's academic performance, and the physical and mental health of those who struggle. [In a recent study](#), public health researchers at Johns Hopkins University found that students who lacked consistent access to enough food were 43 percent less likely to graduate than their food-secure peers.

In another recent survey, [#RealCollege 2020: Five Years of Evidence on Campus Basic Needs Insecurity](#), found that nearly 40 percent of students at two- or four-year schools had experienced food insecurity in the last 30 days. The COVID-19 pandemic has only worsened the situation.

Students at Arizona's public universities are not immune, with surveys indicating 25 to 50 percent of students are experiencing these challenges.

The Arizona Board of Regents recently sought to understand and assess the breadth of the challenges at Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University and the University of Arizona. A work group was developed to determine the scope of student food insecurity issues and housing needs and provide guidance on evidence-based policies and practices to alleviate these needs. Following is the purpose set forth for the work group's initiative:

PURPOSE

1. Assess the scope of food insecurity and housing needs of students on the ASU, NAU and UArizona main campuses.
2. Identify successful processes in place to identify students with housing concerns and food insecurity.
3. Identify mechanisms to support students with food insecurity and housing issues.
4. Review and evaluate existing or emerging best practices from a variety of disciplines.
5. Determine if additional campus data may be gathered and categorized to identify troubled students for the purposes of early intervention and outreach.
6. Provide evidence-based guidance and recommendations regarding campus-based policies and programs related to food insecurity and housing issues.
7. Provide board policy and procedure recommendations to assure appropriate guidance and direction to the universities in/or promoting a healthy campus environment.

This report summarizes the survey administration method, university-level key findings, and recommendations and conclusions from the work group.

DEFINITIONS: FOOD AND HOUSING 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.

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

NATIONAL RESEARCH FINDINGS

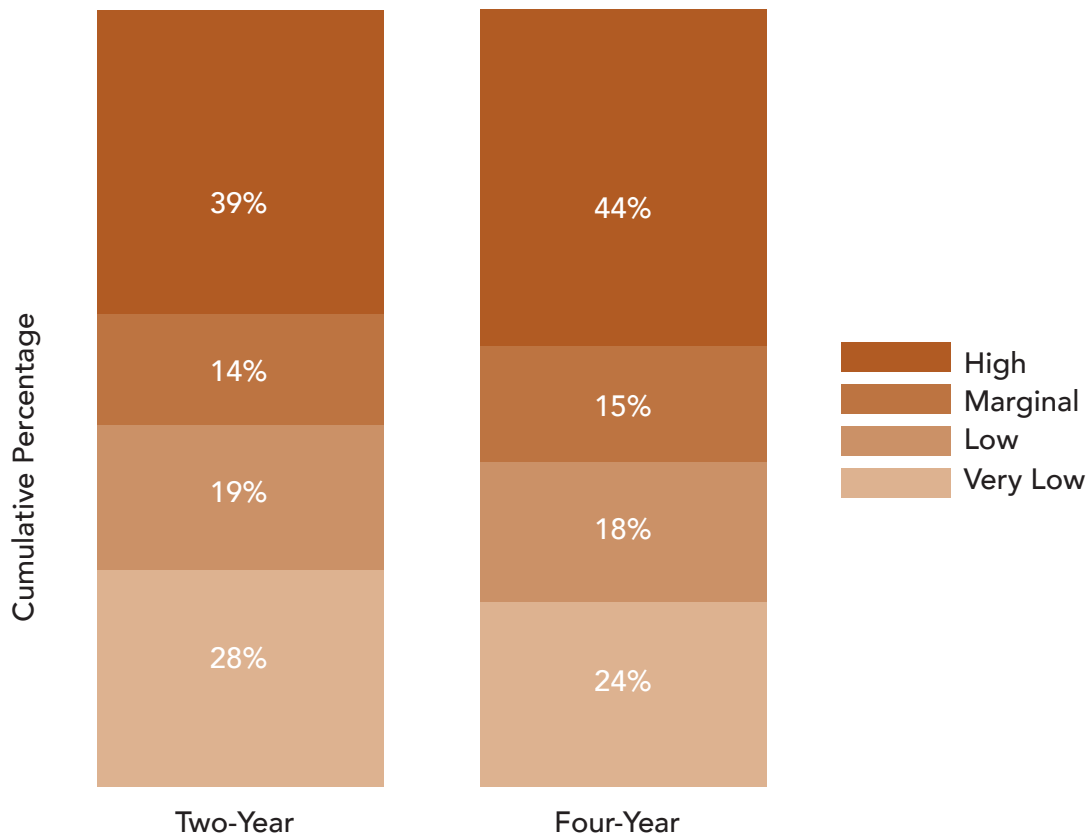
- The [Hope Center's research surveys](#) regarding college and university basic needs insecurity are the nation's largest annual assessment of basic needs security among college students.¹
- Insufficient food and housing undermines postsecondary educational experiences and credential attainment for many of today's college students.²
- Since 2019, 31 quality studies of campus food and housing insecurity have been conducted.²
- Food and housing insecurity undermine academic success.³
- Housing and food insecurity have a particularly strong, statistically significant relationship with college completion rates, persistence and credit attainment.⁴
- Researchers also associate basic needs insecurity with self reports of poor physical health, depression symptoms and higher perceived stress.⁵

NATIONAL SURVEY FINDINGS

In fall of 2019, nearly 167,000 students from 171 two-year and 56 four-year institutions responded to the #RealCollege 2020: Five Years of Evidence on Campus Basic Needs Insecurity survey (February 2020)⁶, which revealed:

- 39 percent of respondents were food insecure in the prior 30 days.
- 46 percent of respondents were housing insecure in the previous year.
- 17 percent of respondents were homeless in the previous year.

FIGURE 1. FOOD SECURITY AMONG SURVEY RESPONDENTS BY SECTOR



Source: 2018 #RealCollegeSurvey

Notes: According to the USDA, students at either low or very low food security are termed "food insecure." For more details on the food security module used in this report, see Appendix C. Cumulative percentage may not add up to 100 due to rounding error.

SURVEY ADMINISTRATION METHODS

Table 1 describes the survey administration method employed at each university. There are notable differences that should be considered as it relates to the timeline and measures used to assess student basic needs. It is also important to recognize these surveys were distributed during COVID-19's disruptions on campus and beyond. Results should be contextualized within this moment of time and conditions. Appendix A describes sample demographics related to population demographics to inform potential survey response bias.

TABLE 1. SURVEY ADMINISTRATION DETAILS BY INSTITUTION

Administration Component	Arizona State University	Northern Arizona University	University of Arizona
Dates of Administration	10/5/20 – 11/5/20	3/7/21 - 3/17/21	2-24/21 - 3/10/21
Incentives	Chance to win one of 10 \$100 gift cards	Chance to win one of 10 \$25 gift cards	Chance to win one of 10 \$25 gift cards
Student Population	All students (including online)	All students (excluding online)	All Tucson campus students (excluding online)
Survey Instrument ¹	#RealCollege Survey Fall 2020 Version	ABOR Work Group Spring 2021 Version	ABOR Work Group Spring 2021 Version
Response Rate	12.8%	16%	10.5%
Survey Sample size (n)	5,434	936	3,605
Population (N)	74,795	21,503	34,467
Survey Sample (N)	42,317	5,877	n/a

¹ There are differences between the versions of survey instruments used in the study. The #RealCollege Survey Fall 2020 version was administered to ASU students in fall 2020. A student basic needs survey instrument was developed with the work group members for NAU and UArizona in spring 2021. The differences between the two versions are noted in footnotes with findings when appropriate.

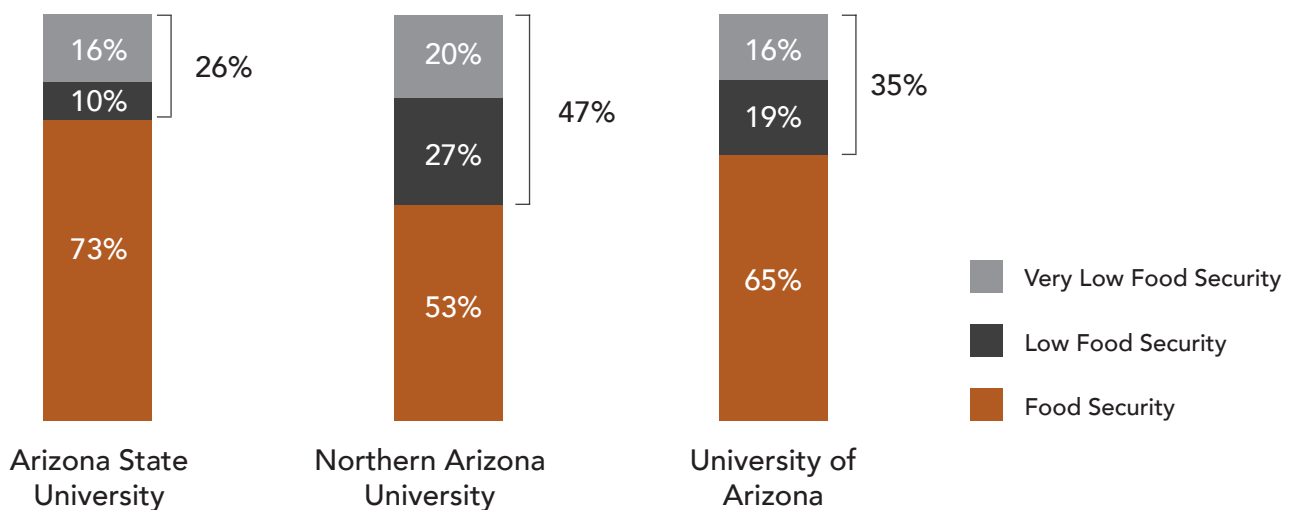
KEY FINDINGS

Food Security

Results in the following graph describe rates of food security as food secure, low food security and very low food security. The low and very low categories are added together to produce an understanding of food insecurity rate.

- The three universities report the following rates of food insecurity among their respective student populations: ASU, 26%, NAU, 47% and UArizona, 35%. See Appendix B for food security question item responses.

FIGURE 2. RATES OF FOOD INSECURITY



A significant number of the students in the survey indicated that they did not have enough money to buy food, ate less than then they felt they should or cut the size of their meals because there was not enough money. When asked if they ever went without eating for an entire day because they lacked enough money for food, a significant percentage said “yes.”

TABLE 2. STUDENTS WHO DID NOT EAT FOR AN ENTIRE DAY BECAUSE THERE WASN'T ENOUGH MONEY FOR FOOD

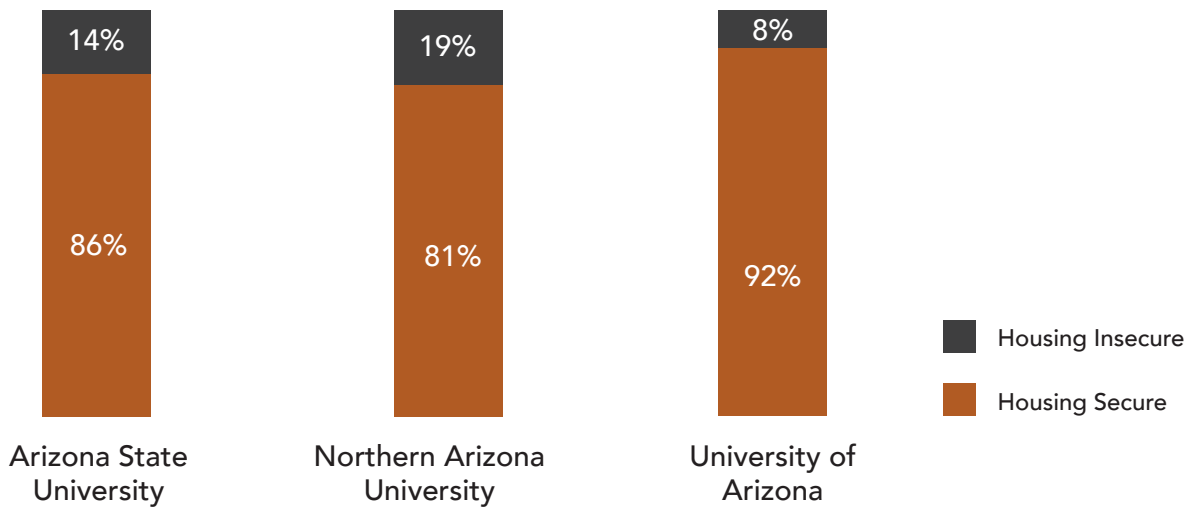
Response	ASU	UARIZONA	NAU
No	95%	83%	75%
Yes	5%	17%	25%

- ASU results were asked within the last 30 days.
- UArizona/NAU results were asked within the last 12 months. “Often true” and “sometimes true” are labeled as “yes.” “Never true” is labeled as “no.”

HOUSING SECURITY

The three universities reported the following housing insecurity rates among their respective student populations: ASU, 14%, NAU, 19% and UArizona, 8%. Find survey question item results of housing security in Appendix C.

FIGURE 3. RATES OF HOUSING INSECURITY



³Different housing survey questions were used between the two survey versions and informed from the UCES Housing, although there were many more overlapping survey question items. A description of the differences of housing security questions is available in Appendix C.

ACADEMIC SUCCESS

- According to a study from the Journal of College Student Retention, food and housing insecurity have massive implications on academic success.
- Students who reported food insecurity, housing insecurity or both also reported very high levels of stress, which detracted from their ability to focus on schoolwork and manage their academic and personal lives.
- These students face difficult choices about how to spend their limited funds, including trade-offs on whether to spend their money on educational expenses or food and housing.
- Universities can encourage continued enrollment, retention and attainment through supporting students who are food and housing insecure.

TABLE 3. RISK OF FAILING COURSES OR WITHDRAWAL FROM COURSES DUE TO HOUSING AND FOOD ISSUES

	Insecure	Not Insecure
Attend Class		
Housing	42.9%	3.3%
Food	44.0%	3.0%
Withdraw/refrain from registering		
Housing	42.9%	3.8%
Food	29.2%	4.4%

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

These findings suggest that addressing food and housing insecurity may be an important student success intervention.

Serving students with the most pressing financial needs on campus requires an institutional shift from considering these issues as individual deficits and instead considering broader trends in college enrollment and cost of living. Intentional changes to improve access and retention of students require additional resources to ensure students can focus on their studies rather than their basic needs.

The reach of a basic needs program for students speaks to the severe challenges that some students face and the necessity for the universities to provide services specific to those students' lived realities.

The following recommendations were made by the work group and approved by the board:

- Develop and provide continued support to a Basic Needs Committee on each university campus.
- Develop a communications plan and portal dedicated to demonstrating and detailing initiatives taken by the universities.
- Initiatives and activities should be linked through azregents.edu and be regularly updated.
- Each university to present an annual report to the board regarding efforts and activities to assess and alleviate student food and housing needs.

Appendix A: Survey Sample Demographics Compared to Population Demographics

Table 1. Arizona State University Sample and Population Demographics

Demographics	Sample (n=5,434) %	Population (N=74,795) %
Academic Career		
Undergraduate/other	74%	84%
Graduate/professional	26%	16%
Ethnicity¹		
African American	7%	4%
American Indian	5%	1%
Asian	15%	8%
Hispanic	22%	24%
International	N/A	<1%
Pacific Islander	2%	5%
Two or more races	N/A	5%
Unknown/Other	6%	2%
White	65%	46%
Undergraduate Pell Grant		
Pell recipient	36%	33%
Not a Pell recipient	64%	67%
Undergraduate First Generation		
First generation	21%	30%
Continuing generation	78%	70%
Gender Identity		
Woman	63%	50%
Man	35%	50%
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual or straight	76%	—
Gay or lesbian	5%	—
Bisexual	12%	—
Decline to state	4%	—
Current Employment		
Yes	66%	—
No	34%	—

1. Sample ethnicity was a “check all that apply” question and includes duplicated students due to multiple ethnicities. Population ethnicities are reported from IPEDS.

Table 2. Northern Arizona University Sample and Population Demographics

Demographics	Sample (n=936) %	Population (N=21,503) %
Academic Career		
Undergraduate	68%	89%
Graduate	32%	11%
IPEDS Ethnicity		
African American	2%	3%
American Indian	3%	1%
Asian	2%	6%
Hispanic	22%	26%
International	4%	8%
Pacific Islander	0%	<1%
Two or more races	4%	5%
Unknown/Other	1%	2%
White	63%	48%
IPEDS Gender Identity		
Woman	76%	62%
Man	24%	38%
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual or straight	71%	—
Gay or lesbian	4%	—
Bisexual	14%	—
Asexual	2%	—
Queer	4%	—
Questioning or unsure	2%	—
Not listed, self-identify	1%	—
Decline to state	5%	—
Location		
Living near or on campus (within 30 miles)	81%	—
Living away from campus (More than 30 miles)	19%	—
Primary Caregiver of Child Under 18	7%	—
Current Employment		
Yes	58%	—
No, looking for work	24%	—
No, not looking for work	18%	—

Table 3. University of Arizona Sample and Population Demographics

Demographics	Sample (n=3,605) %	Population (N=34,467) %
Academic Career		
Undergraduate	74%	81%
Graduate	21%	15%
Law	2%	1%
Medical school	1%	1%
Pharmacy	1%	1%
Veterinary medicine	<1%	<1%
IPEDS Ethnicity		
African American	3%	3%
American Indian	1%	1%
Asian	8%	6%
Hispanic	25%	26%
International	9%	8%
Pacific Islander	<1%	<1%
Two or more races	5%	5%
Unknown/Other	2%	2%
White	47%	48%
Undergraduate Pell Grant	29%	27%
Undergraduate First Generation	30%	30%
IPEDS Gender Identity		
Female	73%	55%
Male	27%	45%
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual or straight	75%	—
Gay or lesbian	4%	—
Bisexual	12%	—
Asexual	2%	—
Queer	4%	—
Questioning or unsure	3%	—
Not listed, self-identify	1%	—
Decline to state	4%	—
Location		
Living near or on campus (within 30 miles)	86%	—
Living away from campus (More than 30 miles)	14%	—
Primary Caregiver of Child Under 18	4%	—
Current Employment		
Yes	53%	—
No, looking for work	23%	—
No, not looking for work	24%	—

Appendix B: Food Security Questions

Table 1. Food Security Question Items for ASU

Question Items	ASU
In the last 30 days, were the following situations often true, sometimes, true or never true for you? (Select one response for each item).	
The food that I bought didn't last, and I didn't have money to get more.	
Never true	79%
Sometimes true	16%
Often true	5%
I couldn't afford to eat balanced meals.	
Never true	69%
Sometimes true	20%
Often true	11%
I worried whether my food would run out before I got money to buy more.	
Never true	70%
Sometimes true	22%
Often true	8%
[If sometimes true or often true on above question(s),] In the last 30 days did you:	
Ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?	
No	78%
Yes	22%
Were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?	
No	83%
Yes	17%
Lose weight because there wasn't enough money for food?	
No	88%
Yes	12%
Ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?	
No	77%
Yes	23%
[If yes,] how often did this happen (you cut the size of your meals or skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food?)	
Once	8%
Twice	18%
Three times	22%
Four times	13%
Five times	10%
More than five times	29%
[If yes to above four questions,] ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food?	
Yes	5%
No	95%
[If yes,] how often did this happen (you did not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food)?	
Once	10%
Twice	29%
Three times	25%
Four times	10%
Five times	6%
More than five times	20%

Source: USDA. (2012). U.S. household food security survey module: Three-stage design, with screeners. Retrieved from: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/media/8279/ad2012.pdf>

Table 2. Food Security Question Items for NAU and UArizona

Question Items	NAU	UA
Please mark whether the statements are never true, sometimes true or often true in the last 12 months.		
The food that I bought just didn't last, and I didn't have money to get more.		
Never true	53%	68%
Sometimes true	38%	23%
Often true	9%	8%
I don't know	0%	1%
I couldn't afford to eat balanced meals.		
Never true	42%	57%
Sometimes true	36%	26%
Often true	22%	16%
I don't know	0%	1%
I did not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food. ¹		
Never true	75%	83%
Sometimes true	18%	13%
Often true	7%	4%
I don't know	0%	1%
In the past 12 months, did you:		
Ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?		
No	38%	40%
Yes	62%	60%
I don't know	0%	<1%
Ever go hungry or didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?		
No	64%	62%
Yes	36%	38%
I don't know	0%	<1%
Ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?		
No	60%	39%
Yes	40%	61%
I don't know	0%	<1%
[If yes,] How often did this happen?		
Almost every month	26%	27%
Some months but not every month	48%	43%
Only one or two months	26%	29%
I don't know	0%	1%

Source: USDA. (2012). U.S. household food security survey module: Six-item short form economic research service. Retrieved from: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/media/8282/short2012.pdf>

¹: Question item is not included in the calculation of food security.

Appendix C: Housing Security Questions

Table 1. Housing Security Questions Items

NAU/UA: In the last 12 months, have you slept in any of the following places because you didn't have a permanent home to return to? (Check all that apply)			
ASU: In the past 12 months have you slept in any of the following places? (Mark Yes or No for each item)			
Survey Question Items	Arizona State University	Northern Arizona University	University of Arizona
None of these	n/a	81%	92%
Temporarily stayed with a relative, friend or couch surfing until I find other housing	10%	8%	7%
Temporarily at a hotel or motel without a permanent home to return to (not on vacation or business travel)	3%	2%	1%
Temporarily in an Airbnb, Home Away or similar without a permanent home to return to (not on vacation or business travel)	n/a	2%	1%
In transitional housing or independent living program	0%	1%	<1%
At a group home such as a halfway house or residential program	n/a	1%	<1%
At a group home such as a halfway house or residential program for mental health or substance abuse	1%	n/a	n/a
At a treatment center (such as detox, hospital, etc.)	1%	n/a	n/a
At a homeless shelter	n/a	0%	<1%
At a shelter	0%	n/a	n/a
In a camper or RV (not on vacation)	1%	n/a	n/a
Outdoor location such as street, sidewalk, alley, bus or train stop, campground or woods, park, beach or riverbed, under bridge or overpass	1%	0%	<1%
In a closed area/space with a roof not meant for human habitation such as car, truck, van, RV, camper, encampment, tent, abandoned building or unconverted garage (not for recreation or leisure)	n/a	1%	<1%
In a closed area/space with a roof not meant for human habitation such as car, truck, van, RV, camper, encampment, tent, abandoned building, or unconverted garage, attic or basement	1%	n/a	n/a
In a living room or another space not originally intended for human habitation (closet, attic, basement, converted garage) in a house or apartment	n/a	3%	<1%

ENDNOTES

1. (2020). The Hope Center. Retrieved October 28, 2021, from <https://hope4college.com/>.
2. U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2018). Food insecurity: Better information could help eligible college students access federal food assistance benefits. (GAO Publication No. 19-95) Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2016). Higher education: Actions needed to improve access to federal financial assistance for homeless and foster youth. (GAO Publication No. 16-343) Washington, D.C.
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6. #RealCollege 2020: Five Years of Evidence on Basic Needs Insecurity. The Hope Center. (2020). Retrieved October 28, 2021, from <https://hope4college.com/realcollege-2020-five-years-of-evidence-on-basic-needs-insecurity/>.



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