



#RealCollege: Basic Needs Insecurity During the Ongoing Pandemic Virginia Community College System Preliminary Results

In fall 2020, higher education was reeling from the coronavirus pandemic. Students and faculty across the country reported exceptional levels of stress and anxiety, and college enrollment was down. By the end of the term, more than 267,000 Americans had died from the pandemic. At the same time, the federal government pumped an unprecedented \$6+ billion into student emergency aid via the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

To better understand the challenges facing Virginia Community College System (VCCS) students in fall 2020, we administered our well-established #RealCollege Survey at the system's 23 colleges from September to November. The survey assessed students' basic needs security and their well-being, as indicated by employment status, academic engagement, and mental health.

Across VCCS, the survey was distributed to more than 122,900 students and taken by 10,671 of them, yielding an estimated response rate of 9%.

THE SURVEY REVEALS



of respondents were **HOUSING INSECURE** in the prior 12 months

Housing insecurity encompasses a broad set of challenges that prevent someone from having a safe, affordable, and consistent place to live including the inability to pay rent or move frequently.¹



of respondents experienced **HOMELESSNESS** in the prior 12 months

Homelessness means that a person does not have a fixed, regular, and adequate place to live. 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).



of respondents were **FOOD INSECURE** in the prior 30 days

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.

Using the 18-item U.S. Department of Agriculture scale to assess food security, we found:

18%
of respondents experienced **VERY LOW** food security

13%
of respondents experienced **LOW** food security

11%
of respondents experienced **MARGINAL** food security

57%
of respondents experienced **HIGH** food security²

¹ To learn more about the #RealCollege Survey research methodology and how you could field the survey at your institution, see The Hope Center's [Guide to Accessing Basic Needs Insecurity in Higher Education](#).

² Numbers above are rounded to the nearest whole number and may not add to 100 due to rounding error.

Full survey results from Virginia Community College System will be published in June 2021.

To see the national 2020 #RealCollege Survey results, visit bit.ly/RCReport2021.