



For College, Community, and Justice

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# Tribal Colleges and Universities #RealCollege Survey

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March 2020

## Executive Summary

Now in its fifth year, the #RealCollege survey is the nation's largest, longest-running annual assessment of basic needs security among college students. In the absence of any federal data on the subject, the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice created the survey to evaluate access to affordable food and housing among college students.

This report describes the results of the #RealCollege survey administered in the fall of 2019 at seven tribal colleges and universities (TCUs), a subset of the 227 two- and four-year institutions surveyed across the United States.

In 2019, approximately 1,050 students from seven tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) responded to the #RealCollege survey. The results indicate:

- 62% of respondents were food insecure in the prior 30 days
- 69% of respondents were housing insecure in the previous year
- 30% of respondents were homeless in the previous year

These rates are substantially higher than those observed for other types of institutions; the Hope Center reports that 39% of national participants experience food insecurity, 46% experience housing insecurity, and 17% experience homelessness.<sup>1</sup>

TCU students who have been system-involved (foster youth or returning citizens) are especially likely to face basic needs insecurity. There is variation—approximately 10 percentage points—in rates of basic needs insecurity across TCUs. While TCUs span various regions across the country, one commonality is that these institutions provide a culturally responsive education to students who are often marginalized in higher education.

Tribal colleges and universities are primarily tribally chartered higher education institutions that provide access for Native students to an accredited institution on or near the reservation communities they call home. They are geographically and culturally diverse while also sharing common goals such as integrating cultural values and connection to land into curriculum and pedagogy while emphasizing community outreach and education that is rooted in tribal identity and practice.

**Students at TCUs need and deserve much more support. The Hope Center thanks the American Indian College Fund and the participating colleges for making it possible to document these challenges.**

## A Letter from the American Indian College Fund

The American Indian College Fund (the College Fund) was established in 1989 to invest in “Native students and tribal college education to transform lives and communities.” The College Fund does this through scholarships, college and career pathways programming, and strategies that support student successful completion. To date, the College Fund has awarded more than \$221.8 million in scholarship funds. The College Fund also directly supports tribal colleges and universities and their communities through programs focused on cultural, language, and Native arts preservation; environmental sustainability, early childhood education; faculty development; and more.<sup>2</sup>

The work of the College Fund is integral to the success of the students it serves. As part of its role, the College Fund amplifies Native voices in education conversations by helping both tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) and the wider higher education community obtain and understand data regarding American Indian college access and student success.

Tribal colleges and universities are unique higher education institutions in the United States. Culturally and geographically diverse, TCUs share novel characteristics. They build strong connections to the physical and cultural spaces in the communities they serve, create culturally based curriculum, incorporate indigenous pedagogy, and provide community-based education and outreach that is rooted in tribal identity and practice.

As of the spring of 2019, 29 tribally chartered institutions are among the 35 accredited TCU members of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), the national TCU member association. Tribal sovereign authority and the ability to charter education institutions to serve their communities has made postsecondary institutions serving tribal people a reality. Although not tribally chartered, the six other AIHEC-member TCUs are also unique in their cultural mission to serve predominantly American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) student populations. According to the fall 2017 enrollment data from the National Center for Education Statistics and enrollment data from AIHEC from the same semester, approximately 11% of all AIAN students studying at a two- or four-year public or private or not-for-profit postsecondary institution attended a TCU.<sup>3</sup>

We are pleased that seven TCUs from the Midwest, Great Plains, and Southwest participated in the fall 2019 #RealCollege Survey. These institutions serve diverse tribal communities and this report demonstrates the very real impacts of poverty on TCU students’ lives. We encourage you to read this report and consider ways in which institutions can better support students across the country.

*Cheryl Crazy Bull*

Cheryl Crazy Bull, President and CEO  
American Indian College Fund

## Introduction

Most colleges and universities are striving to build enrollment and increase college completion rates. Their efforts include changes to the structure of academic programs and teaching, advising, and strategically using scholarships. But until recently, few institutions identified basic needs insecurity as a significant challenge keeping students from obtaining credentials. In 2018, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report on food insecurity among college students stating that “increasing evidence indicates that some college students are experiencing food insecurity, which can negatively impact their academic success.” The GAO concluded that the “substantial federal investment in higher education is at risk if college students drop out because they cannot afford basic necessities like food.”<sup>4</sup>

The #RealCollege survey is one of 31 studies the GAO reviewed for its report. It assists college administrators, trustees, staff, faculty, and students, along with community partners, policymakers, and advocates, in understanding the prevalence and correlates of food and housing insecurity on college campuses across the nation. The report provides the most up-to-date evidence, and this year’s report includes other key factors affecting basic needs insecurity, including transportation and childcare. The data provide ample reason to center efforts to address students’ basic needs as institutions seek to become “student-ready” colleges where degree completion is common.<sup>5</sup>

Supporting students’ basic needs has many benefits for colleges and universities, especially in today’s difficult economic climate. Here are five key reasons for addressing #RealCollege issues:

1. Boost academic performance, helping the institution and its students retain federal financial aid. It also promotes retention and degree completion, helping the institution generate more tuition dollars and improving outcomes about which legislators and funders care.
2. Reduce the barriers that returning adults face, boosting enrollment and retention.
3. Make the jobs of faculty and staff easier, as students are more able to focus on learning.
4. Create bridges between the institution and community organizations, bringing new relationships and resources to bear. It also creates a productive opportunity for the private sector to engage with the institution to help create the graduates that everyone wants to hire.
5. Generate new philanthropic giving and create opportunities to engage alumni who do not have much but will happily contribute to emergency aid.

There are many paths to implementing programs and policies to support students’ basic needs, several of which are listed at the conclusion of this report. The Hope Center strongly recommends focusing on prevention, rather than only responding to emergencies, and finds that systemic reforms are far more effective than one-time solutions.



TCUs have been aware of basic needs challenges among their students for many years. There are significant political, economic, and social forces undermining the wellbeing in the communities that are home to these institutions. Recent research finds higher rates of homelessness among American Indian and Alaska Native youth and young adults compared to other racial and ethnic subpopulations.<sup>6</sup> Support for students' basic needs comes in many forms at TCUs, including through a longstanding culture of caring and community support that results from a tradition of communal support in Native communities.

At TCUs the culture of caring emerges from Native values rooted in relationships, place-based knowledge, and communal experiences. TCUs place high value on student identity, self-esteem, and personal and tribal self-determination. The spring 2019 study of TCU student experiences conducted by the Center for Community College Student Engagement showed: 77% of respondents strongly agreed that their TCU has taken a holistic approach to student development, 80% strongly agreed that they feel their college has helped develop their Native American identity, and finally, 88% agreed that they felt a sense of belonging at TCUs.<sup>7</sup>

Later this year, the federal government will—for the first time—begin assessing food and housing insecurity among students with the National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey, a step the Hope Center has long advocated. In addition, numerous other organizations have begun including similar assessments in their surveys, including the [Trellis Financial Wellness Survey](#), the [Community College Survey of Student Engagement](#) (survey questions now in the pilot stage), the [ACHA-National College Health Assessment](#), and the [CIRP Freshman Survey](#). In addition, some colleges and universities are integrating basic needs insecurity assessments into their early warning systems and institutional surveys. The Hope Center is heartened by this response and continues to provide technical support in several ways, including the publication of a [guide](#) for assessment tools.



## 2019 Findings Overview

This report presents findings from the 2019 #RealCollege survey on basic needs of students attending TCUs. Section 1 presents the overall rates of basic needs insecurity across all survey respondents. Section 2 shows disparate rates of basic needs insecurity by specific groups of students. Section 3 describes the work experiences of students with basic needs insecurity, and Section 4 describes the academic performance of students with basic needs insecurity. Section 5 describes students' utilization of public assistance and on-campus supports. Section 6 contains concluding remarks and recommendations.

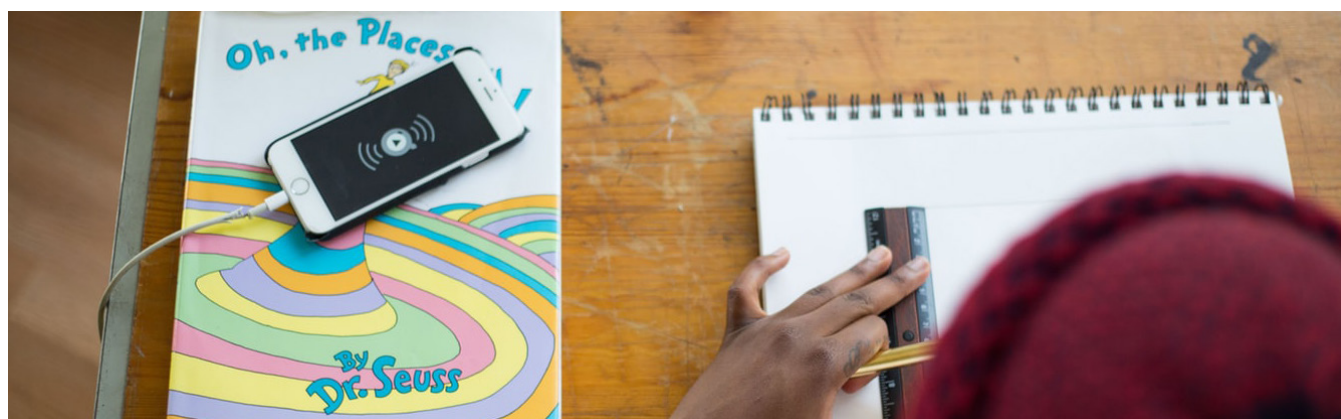
For more information on 2019 survey participants and methodologies used for this report, refer to the [web appendices](#).

### THE DATA

The data elements in this report were gathered using an online survey fielded to all enrolled students at participating colleges and universities. Colleges distributed the online survey to more than 4,900 enrolled students, yielding an estimated response rate of 21.4%, or approximately 1,050 total student participants. This response rate is much higher than the average nationally (8.4% in fall 2019). For more information on how the survey was fielded and a discussion of how representative the results are, refer to the [web appendices](#).

**The following tribal colleges and universities participated in the fall 2019 survey:**

- Diné College (AZ)
- Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College (MN)
- Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Community College (WI)
- Oglala Lakota College (SD)
- Salish Kootenai College (MT)
- United Tribes Technical College (ND)
- White Earth Tribal and Community College (MN)





## SECTION 1:

### Prevalence of Basic Needs Insecurity

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What fraction of students are affected by basic needs insecurity? This section examines the prevalence of food insecurity during the month prior to the survey, and the prevalence of housing insecurity and homelessness during the previous year.

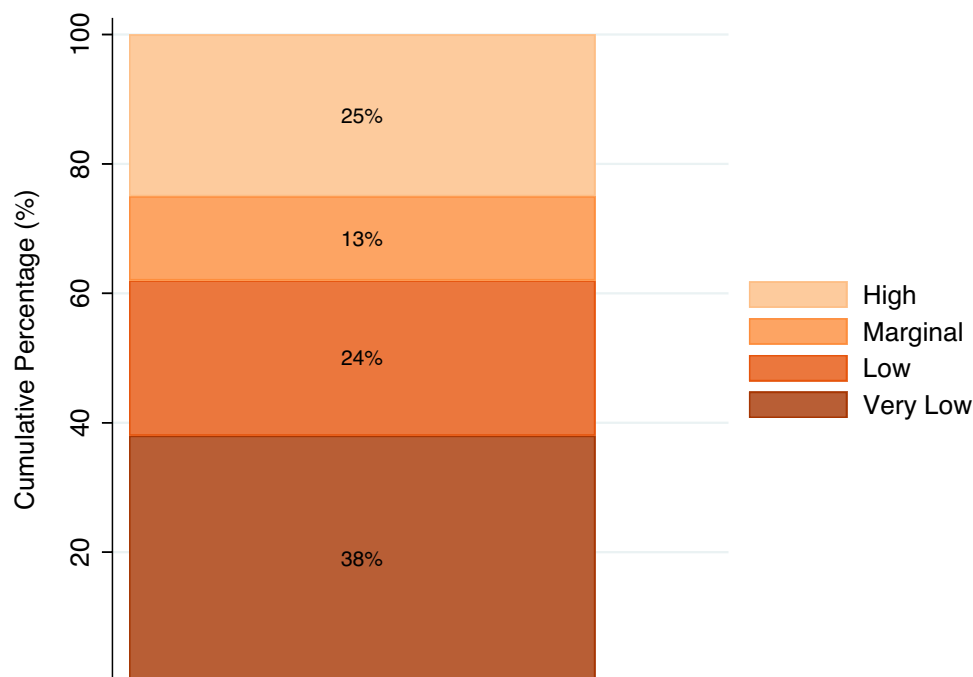
#### FOOD INSECURITY

**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. The survey assesses food security among students using the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) 18-item set of questions.<sup>8</sup>

During the 30 days preceding the survey, approximately 62% of survey respondents from TCUs experienced food insecurity, with 24% assessed at the low level and 38% at the very low level of food security (Figure 1). Nationally, 39% of survey respondents experienced food insecurity.



**FIGURE 1. Food Security Among Tribal College and University Survey Respondents**



Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

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, refer to the [web appendices](#). Cumulative percentages may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

At TCUs, more than half of respondents ran short on food, and more than one in three said that they went hungry (Figure 2).

The geographic context of TCUs is important to a full assessment of the experiences of TCU students with food insecurity. Many American Indian and Alaska Native communities, especially those where TCUs are located, are extremely rural and have limited access to both fresh and processed foods. While there is a growing movement to promote local food among tribal nations, TCUs, and tribal community development corporations, the lack of access associated with the high cost of food significantly contributes to food insecurity. Some challenges contributing to limited access include transportation and food availability issues.<sup>9</sup>



**FIGURE 2. Food Insecurity Among Tribal College and University Survey Respondents**

I couldn't afford to eat balanced meals.	<b>61%</b>
I worried whether my food would run out before I got money to buy more.	<b>67%</b>
The food that I bought did not last and I did not have the money to buy more.	<b>59%</b>
I cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there was not enough money for food.	<b>51%</b>
I ate less than I felt I should because there was not enough money for food.	<b>48%</b>
I was hungry but did not eat because there was not enough money for food.	<b>38%</b>
I cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there was not enough money for food (3 or more times).	<b>35%</b>
I lost weight because there was not enough money for food.	<b>26%</b>
I did not eat for a whole day because there was not enough money for food.	<b>19%</b>
I did not eat for a whole day because there was not enough money for food (3 or more times).	<b>10%</b>

Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: For more details on the food security module used in this report, refer to the [web appendices](#).



## HOUSING INSECURITY AND HOMELESSNESS

**Housing insecurity** includes a broad set of housing challenges that prevent someone from having a safe, affordable, and consistent place to live. Housing insecurity among students was assessed with a nine-item set of questions the Hope Center developed, which looks at factors such as the ability to pay rent or utilities and the need to move frequently. The data show that students are more likely to suffer some form of housing insecurity than to have all their needs met during college.

Sixty-nine percent of survey respondents from TCUs experienced housing insecurity in the past 12 months (Figure 3), compared to 46% of national respondents. The most commonly reported challenge (40% of students) is paying the full amount of utilities (gas, electric, or oil). Eleven percent of survey respondents left their household because they felt unsafe. Please note that while 11% of respondents left their household due to safety issues, this reporting does not include students who are living in an unsafe housing situation and do not leave.

Again, understanding the experiences of TCU students with housing insecurity and homelessness requires context. Although about half of TCUs provide student housing, the housing is very limited. Tribal housing, which is a form of public housing provided primarily through federal appropriations, is extremely under-capitalized in tribal communities. Therefore, it is crucial to consider affordability and availability of housing when exploring options to address housing insecurity.<sup>10</sup>



**FIGURE 3. Housing Insecurity Among Tribal College and University Survey Respondents**

Any Item	69%
Had a rent or mortgage increase that made it difficult to pay	21%
Did not pay full amount of rent or mortgage	30%
Did not pay full amount of utilities	40%
Had an account default or go into collections	32%
Moved in with people due to financial problems	26%
Lived with others beyond the expected capacity of the housing	22%
Left household because felt unsafe	11%
Moved three or more times	7%
Received a summons to appear in housing court	2%

Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Generally tribal governments and tribal housing programs do not operate housing courts; if evicted, a tribal citizen could appear before a tribal housing committee or board. For more details on the housing insecurity module used in this report, refer to the [web appendices](#).





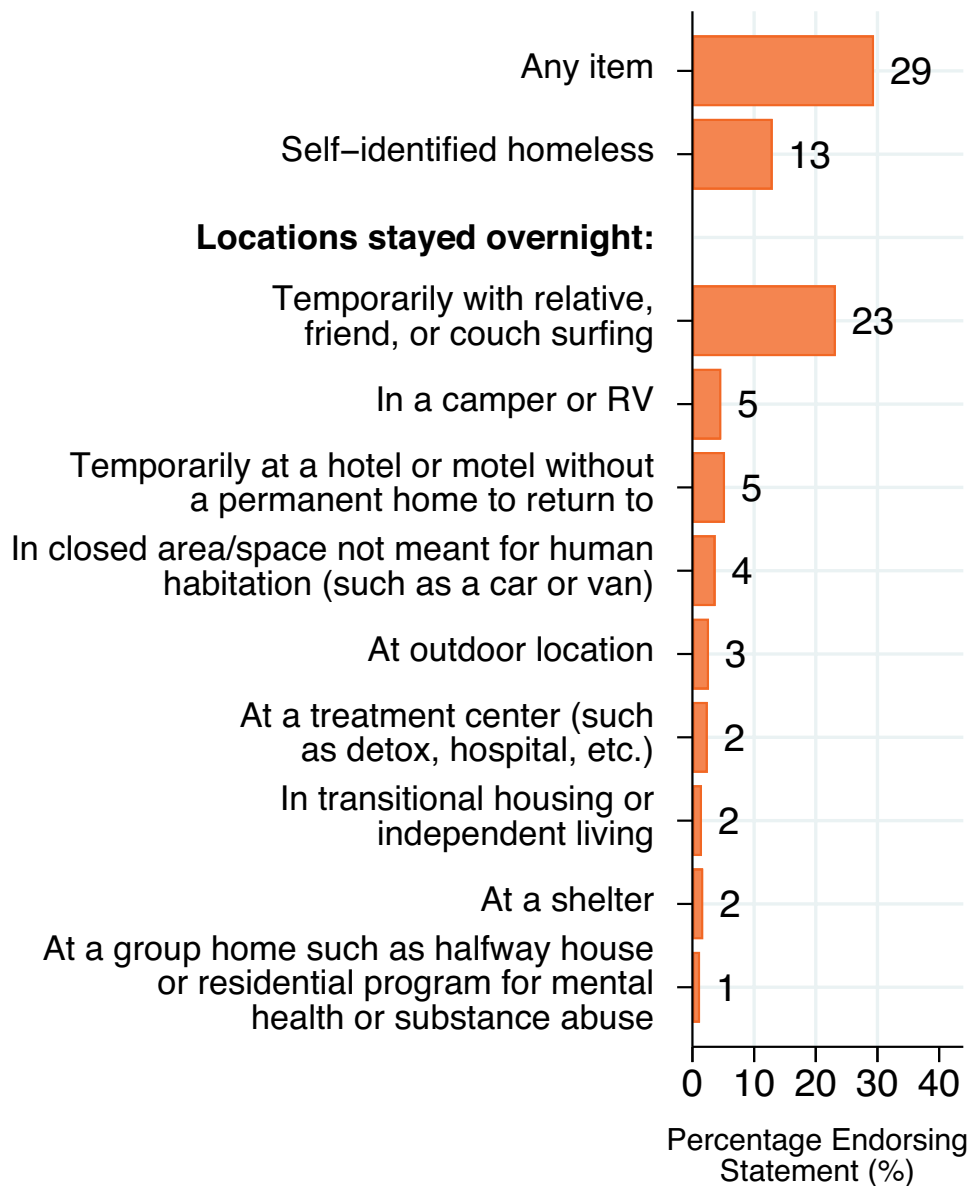
**Homelessness** means that a person does not have a fixed, regular and adequate place to live. Students were identified as homeless if they responded affirmatively to a question asking if they had been homeless or they identified living conditions that are considered signs of homelessness. California State University researchers developed the tool used in this report to assess homelessness. Using an inclusive definition of homelessness that lets respondents self-identify both their status and living condition allows more students to receive the support they need, as well as aligning with the McKinney-Vento Homelessness Assistance Act.<sup>11</sup> A recent Brookings Institution study of K-12 students found that “academic outcomes for doubled-up homeless students and other homeless students are almost indistinguishable from one another.”<sup>12</sup>

Homelessness affected 29% of survey respondents at TCUs (Figure 4), compared to 17% of national survey respondents. Thirteen percent of respondents self-identified as homeless; 16% experienced homelessness but did not self-identify as homeless. Twenty-three percent of students who experienced homelessness temporarily stayed with a relative, friend, or other person, which is called couch surfing. It is important to note that extended family relationships are integral to tribal cultural values and may impact the way that students view their status. It would not be unusual for students to live in multi-generational environments but still possibly need their own home.

Thirteen percent of respondents self-identified as homeless, which is much higher than the 2% to 5% of students nationally who self-identified as homeless.



**FIGURE 4. Homelessness Among Tribal College and University Survey Respondents**



Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

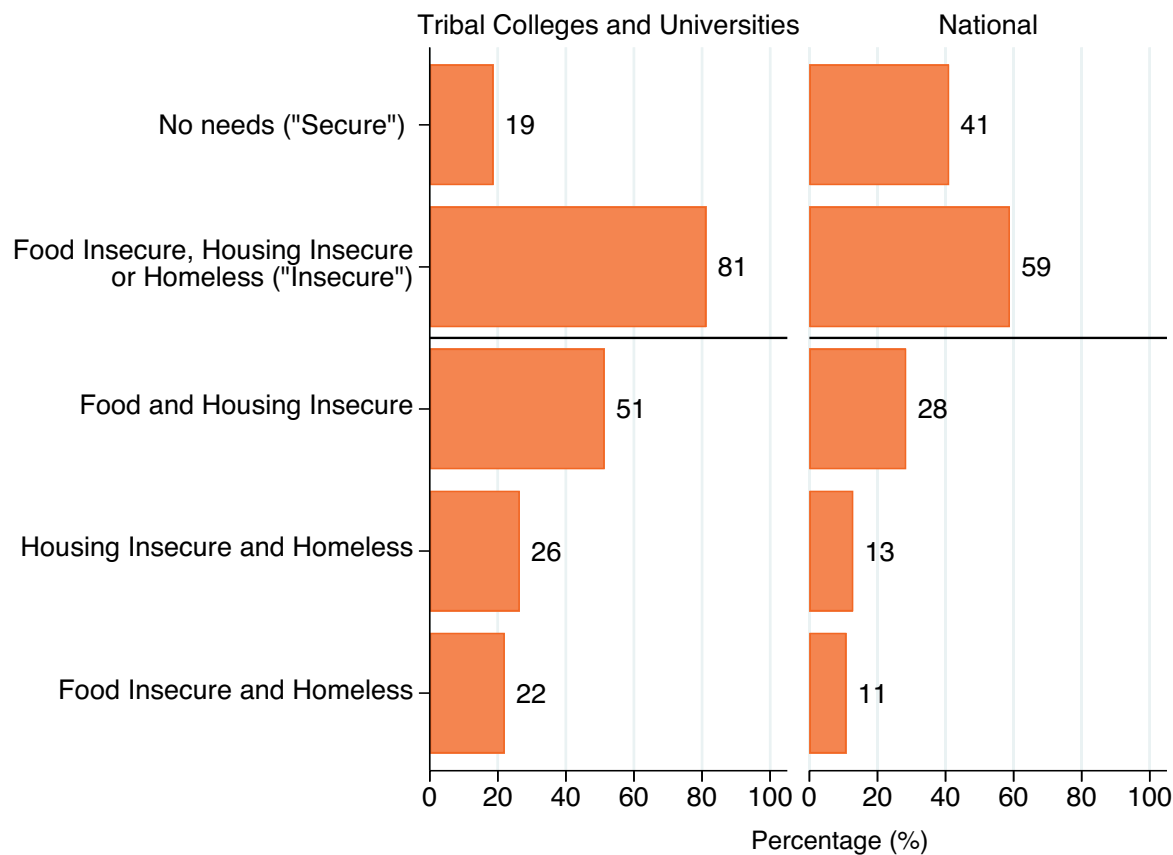
Note: For more details on the homelessness module used in this report, refer to the [web appendices](#).

## OVERLAPPING CHALLENGES

Students often experience basic needs insecurity in one or more forms, either simultaneously or over time. Students' overlapping challenges in the data demonstrate that basic needs insecurities are fluid and interconnected.

Approximately 80% TCU students responding to the survey experienced food insecurity, housing insecurity, or homelessness during the previous year (Figure 5). More than half of respondents were both food and housing insecure in the past year.

**FIGURE 5. Intersections of Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity, and Homelessness Among Tribal College and University Survey Respondents**



Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, refer to the [web appendices](#).

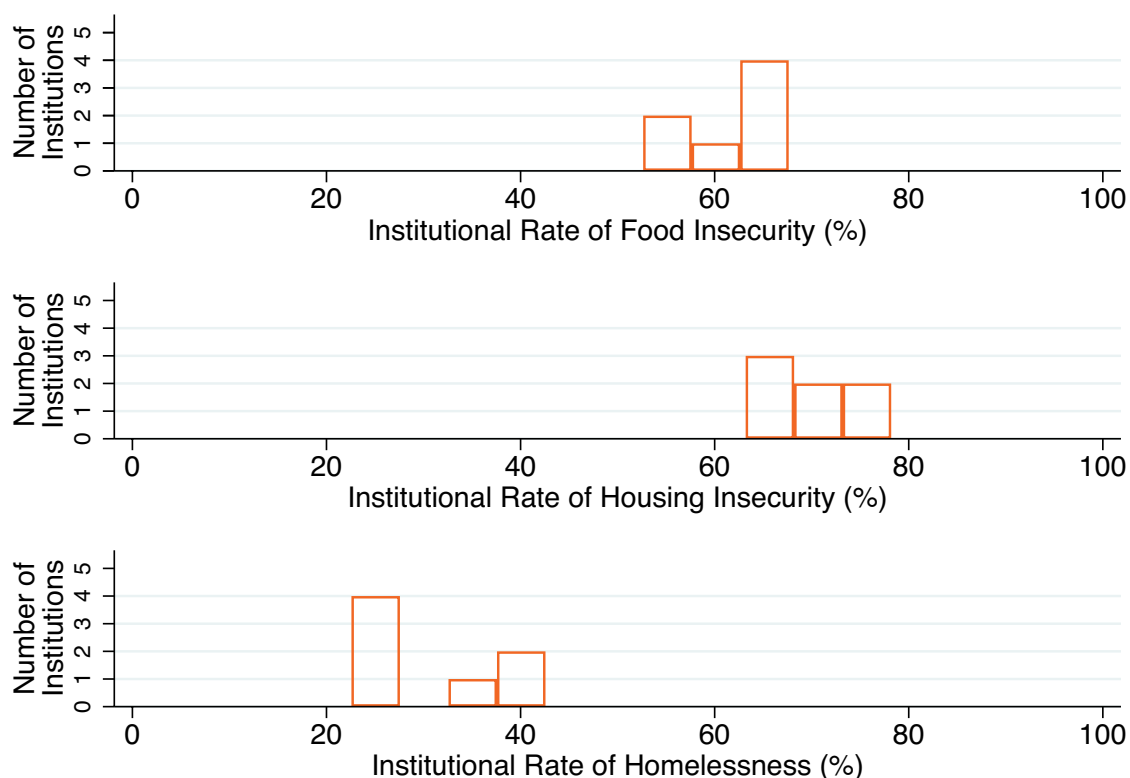


## VARIATION BY INSTITUTION

Rates of basic needs insecurity vary not only in type and severity among students, but across institutions as well (Figure 6). There is some variation in rates of basic needs insecurity across TCUs. This variation could be attributed to a number of factors, for example regional differences across the country. Survey respondents attend one of seven colleges from six states (Arizona, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin). TCU students may experience challenges such as food deserts, availability of tribal housing stock, and transportation access depending on where they live and attend college.

For the most part, institution-level rates of food insecurity range between 56% and 66% across TCUs. Rates of housing insecurity vary across institutions as well, with rates ranging from 65% to 75% of students experiencing housing insecurity. Institution-level rates of student homelessness range from 23% to 38% across TCUs.

**FIGURE 6. Variation in Institutional Rates of Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity, and Homelessness Among Tribal Colleges and Universities**



Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: For more details on institutional rates shown in the figure above, refer to the [web appendices](#).

## SECTION 2:

### Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurity

The Hope Center’s prior work, as well as that by other researchers, has consistently found that some students are at higher risk of basic needs insecurity than others.<sup>13</sup> This section highlights disparities in basic needs insecurity among respondents at TCUs by student demographic, academic, or economic characteristics, as well as their life circumstances. Below we highlight several ways in which basic needs insecurity differs.

For more on demographic disparities and additional tables with information on survey participants, refer to the [web appendices](#).

Students attending TCUs across all racial and ethnic backgrounds experience higher rates of basic needs insecurity compared to national rates. Rates of food insecurity are highest among Black (70%), Hispanic or Latinx (66%), and American Indian or Alaska Native or Indigenous (64%) students at TCUs (Table 1). Rates of housing insecurity are generally higher than those of food insecurity: rates are highest for students who are Hispanic or Latinx (77%) and American Indian or Alaska Native or Indigenous (71%). Students who identify as Black have the highest rates of homelessness (35%), followed closely by Hispanic or Latinx (31%), American Indian or Alaska Native or Indigenous (30%), and White (30%) students.

**TABLE 1. Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurities by Race and Ethnicity Among Tribal College and University Survey Respondents**

	Number of Students	Food Insecurity (%)	Housing Insecurity (%)	Homelessness (%)
<b>Racial or Ethnic Background</b>				
American Indian or Alaska Native or Indigenous	775	64	71	30
Black	23	70	65	35
Hispanic or Latinx	35	66	77	31
White	194	56	68	30
Other	23	61	78	26
Prefer not to answer	15	60	73	27

Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: The Number of Students column indicates the number of survey respondents to our measure of homelessness. The number of survey respondents for our measures of food insecurity and housing insecurity may vary slightly. Classifications of racial/ethnic background are not mutually exclusive. Not all classifications are shown in the above table due to small sample sizes. Students who identified as "American Indian or Alaska Native" or "Indigenous" are combined into one group for reporting purposes. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, see [web appendices](#).

The overall rate of food insecurity for students attending school full-time is 64%, which is approximately nine percentage points higher than the overall rate for those attending part-time (Table 2). Students that have spent more than three years in college are more likely to experience housing insecurity than those who have been in college less than one year.

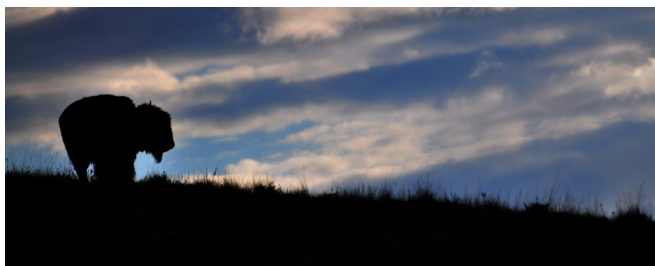
**TABLE 2. Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurities by Enrollment Status Among Tribal College and University Survey Respondents**

Only two of the 35 accredited TCUs explicitly offer federal student loans, so students' loans may come from many other sources.

	Number of Students	Food Insecurity (%)	Housing Insecurity (%)	Homelessness (%)
<b>College Enrollment Status</b>				
Full-time (at least 12 credits)	724	64	68	31
Part-time (fewer than 12 credits)	245	55	72	24
<b>Level of Study</b>				
Undergraduate	820	63	71	29
Non-degree	40	50	60	33
<b>Years in College</b>				
Less than 1	280	58	65	36
1 to 2	292	61	65	26
Three or more	397	64	75	27
<b>Finances College with Loans</b>				
Yes	168	61	71	32
No	803	62	68	29

Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: The Number of Students column indicates the number of survey respondents to our measure of homelessness. The number of survey respondents for our measures of food insecurity and housing insecurity may vary slightly. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, see [web appendices](#).





Students' basic needs insecurity varies in relationship to their gender identity and sexual orientation (Table 3). Female students experience higher rates of housing insecurity (71%) than male students, while male students experience higher rates of homelessness (34%) than female students. Rates of homelessness are highest for students who identify as bisexual (42%) and gay or lesbian (39%).

**TABLE 3. Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurities by Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Among Tribal College and University Survey Respondents**

	Number of Students	Food Insecurity (%)	Housing Insecurity (%)	Homelessness (%)
<b>Gender Identity</b>				
Female	650	62	71	28
Male	229	62	66	34
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>				
Heterosexual	729	62	70	28
Gay or Lesbian	28	54	61	39
Bisexual	65	66	65	42
Self-describe	16	63	63	31

Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: The Number of Students column indicates the number of survey respondents to our measure of homelessness. The number of survey respondents for our measures of food insecurity and housing insecurity may vary slightly. Classifications of gender identity are not mutually exclusive. Students could self-identify with multiple classifications. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, see [web appendices](#).



In addition, particular life circumstances are associated with a higher-than-average risk of basic needs insecurity. Parenting students, former foster youth, and returning citizens are more likely to experience basic needs insecurity than their peers (Table 4). For example, 66% of parenting students experience food insecurity and 78% experience housing insecurity—rates of insecurity higher than their peers without children (58% and 62%, respectively). Eighty-six percent of former foster youth and 81% of returning citizens experience housing insecurity, which is above the average rate among TCU survey respondents (69%).

**TABLE 4. Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurities by Student Experience Among Tribal College and University Survey Respondents**

	Number of Students	Food Insecurity (%)	Housing Insecurity (%)	Homelessness (%)
<b>Parenting Student</b>				
Yes	425	66	78	26
No	528	58	62	32
<b>Student has Been in Foster Care</b>				
Yes	94	78	86	41
No	772	60	67	28
<b>Student Served in the Military</b>				
Yes	30	57	73	33
No	850	62	69	30
<b>Student is a Returning Citizen</b>				
Yes	114	70	81	37
No	757	61	67	27

Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: “Returning citizen” in this report refers to a student who was convicted of a crime, some of whom were previously incarcerated. The Number of Students column indicates the number of survey respondents to our measure of homelessness. The number of survey respondents for our measures of food insecurity and housing insecurity may vary slightly. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, see [web appendices](#).

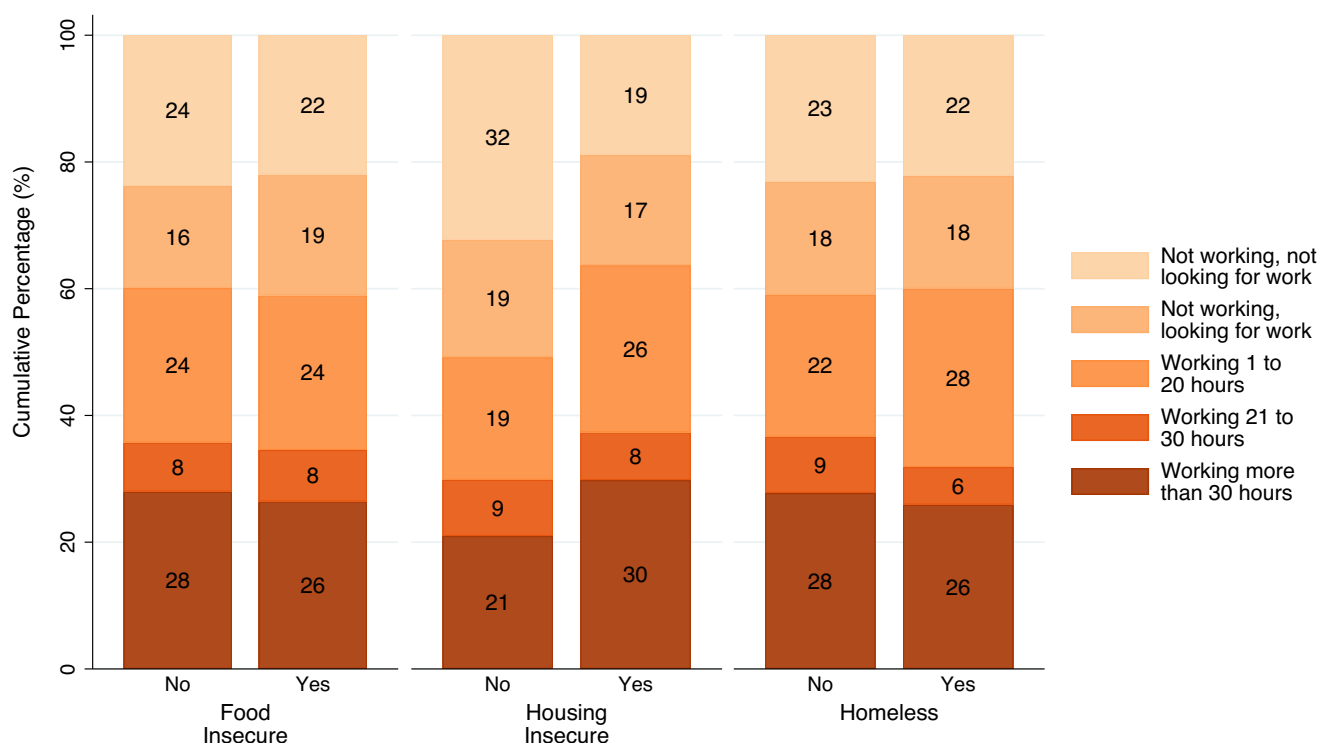


## SECTION 3: Employment

Students who experience basic needs insecurity are overwhelmingly active participants in the labor force. The majority (61%) of students who experience food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness are employed (Figure 7). Among working students, those who experience basic needs insecurity often work similar hours to secure students.

However, employment may not directly translate into economic or basic needs security for Native students because of labor market challenges and systemic poverty. TCUs are generally located in areas with low wages, high unemployment and underemployment, and a lack of public and private resources that support employment such as public transportation and childcare. The costs of housing and food impact the security that students may otherwise experience when employed. In fact, the data appears to indicate that TCU students are among the working poor, individuals who are active in the labor force - working for 27 weeks or more in a year - but whose incomes still fall below the official poverty level.<sup>14</sup>

**FIGURE 7. Employment Behavior by Basic Need Insecurity Status Among Tribal College and University Survey Respondents**



Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Cumulative percentages may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding. Survey questions about work status and number of hours worked were administered to a subset of randomly selected respondents. For more details on how each measure of insecurity was constructed, refer to the [web appendices](#).



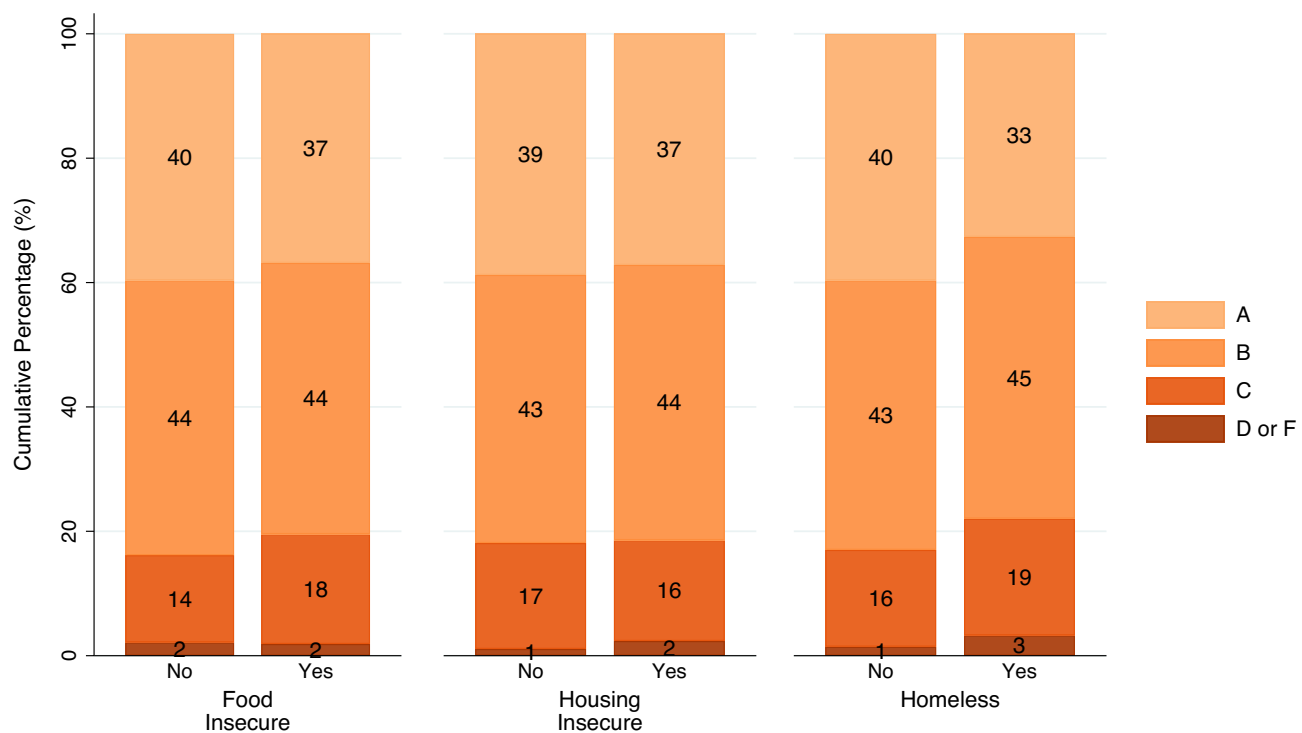
## SECTION 4:

### Academic Performance

Most students report receiving A's and B's, and students who experience food insecurity, housing insecurity, or homelessness report grades of C or below at similar rates to students who do not face these challenges (Figure 8).

Supports provided by TCUs may be a factor in the success of students who otherwise experience food and housing insecurity. TCUs are noted for their personalized support of students through faculty relationships, small class sizes, focus on cultural and personal identity, and their support for students' commitment to giving back to their communities.<sup>15</sup>

**FIGURE 8. Self-Reported Grades by Basic Need Insecurity Status Among Tribal College and University Survey Respondents**



Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Cumulative percentages may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, refer to the [web appendices](#).

## SECTION 5:

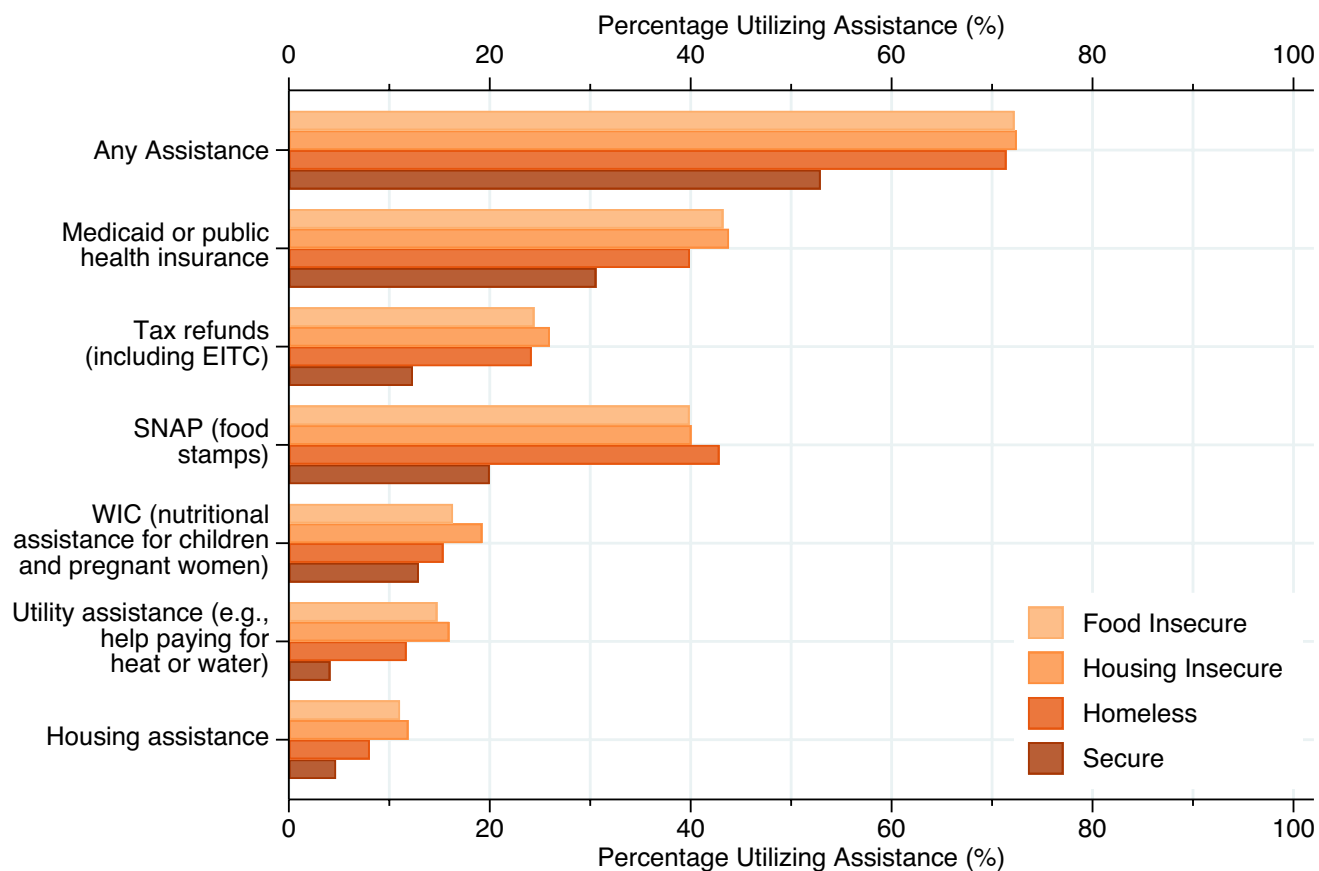
### Utilization of Supports

While supports for students exist on the federal, state, and college levels, results continue to show that most students who experience basic needs insecurity do not access them (Figure 9).<sup>16</sup> Medicaid, Indian Health Service, or public health insurance, SNAP, and tax refunds are the benefits used most often, though they remain quite low given the needs of students responding. For example, less than 40% of food insecure students receive SNAP benefits. Likewise, only 12% of students who experience housing insecurity receive housing assistance. Forty percent of students who experience homelessness utilized Medicaid, Indian Health Service, public health insurance. That said, rates of public benefits utilization among TCUs students are higher than the averages we observe for institutions nationwide. It is also worth noting that students who are secure in their basic needs are still accessing public benefits, albeit at lower rates (53%) than students who are insecure.

Besides the geographically related challenges of accessing public benefits, TCU students generally reside in environments where public benefits are dependent on federal appropriations associated with treaty commitments. Treaties between Native Nations and the U.S. Congress are the underpinning of public resources provided by tribal, state, and federal programs. While complicated, recognition that this unique relationship influences access to resources is important to understanding TCU students' experiences.<sup>17</sup>



**FIGURE 9. Use of Public Assistance According to Basic Needs Security Among Tribal College and University Survey Respondents**



Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

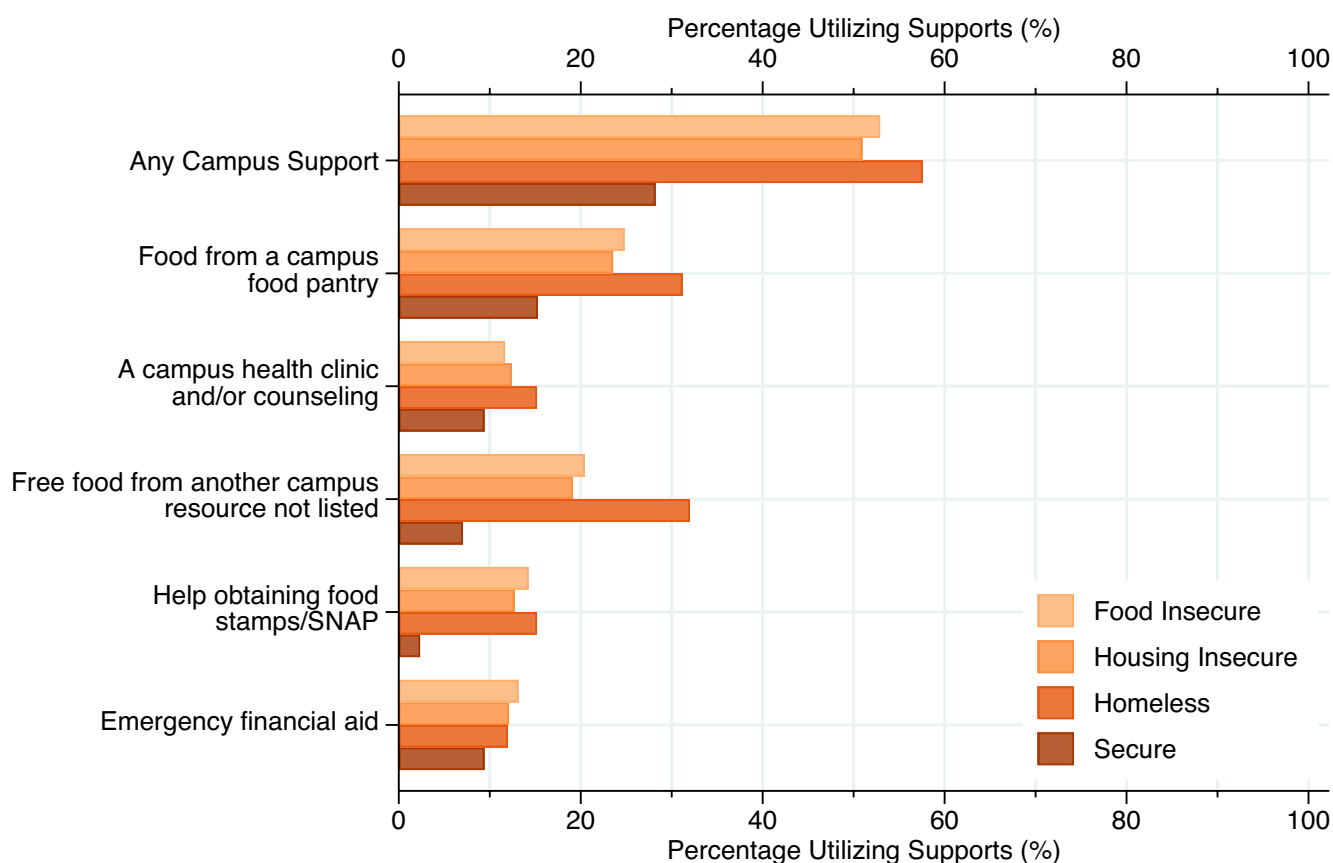
Notes: Rather than accessing Medicaid or public health insurance, many TCU students access Indian Health Service which provides clinics and hospitals in their communities. Not all types of public assistance are included in the figure above. See [web appendices](#) for more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed and rates of utilization for other types of public assistance.



The number of on-campus supports being offered is increasing, but that does not mean students that need them the most are accessing those resources (Figure 10). Of the students surveyed at participating institutions, food from a campus food pantry, free food from another campus resource, and help obtaining food stamps/SNAP are the most commonly used on-campus supports. Campus health clinics or student mental health services are rarely provided on-campus at TCUs.

It is worth noting that TCUs are under-resourced, which often results in limited capacity to address students' food and housing insecurities. Several TCUs are providing at least one free daily meal to students, usually at the institutions' expense. Tribes may have general assistance programs that provide support for emergencies such as deaths of family members or medical transportation, but rarely provide resources for what are considered daily living costs such as utilities or car repairs.

**FIGURE 10. Use of On-Campus Supports According to Basic Needs Security Among Tribal College and University Survey Respondents**



Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Not all types on-campus supports are included in the figure above. See [web appendices](#) for more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed and rates of utilization for other types of on-campus supports.



## SECTION 6:

### Conclusion and Recommendations

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Clearly, basic needs insecurity is a substantial problem affecting many students. Providing support will help students and institutions thrive. Here are strategies for TCUs to continue advancing their work in this area.

1. Assess the landscape of existing supports on campus and through tribal government programs, including food pantries, emergency aid programs, access to public benefits, and case managers. The Hope Center recommends paying close attention to the approaches to outreach, the requirements for eligibility, the data collected on numbers served, and the capacity (dollars, staffing, hours, etc.) of these efforts. Please see the Hope Center's survey of campus food pantries for an [example](#).
2. Continue to expand public benefits access for students. Services in tribal communities are often located in places that limit timely access for students; creating campus-based centralized services would be a path to addressing access.
3. Create tools such as a centralized basic needs website or a local resource manual listing available supports, including:
  - How to access public benefits
  - How to reduce the cost of utilities
  - How to secure emergency aid
  - Where to find free food
  - Who to call if more comprehensive support is needed
4. Encourage faculty to add a [basic needs security statement](#) to their syllabus in order to inform themselves and their students of supports. Due to low faculty-to-student ratios at many TCUs, there are unique opportunities for faculty to have meaningful connections with students.
5. Provide place-based information for faculty and student services personnel so specific assistance supports can be accessed.
6. Create social media and public education campaigns that advocate public policy changes and sufficient funding through federal, state, and tribal appropriations, as well as private funding to adequately address food and housing insecurities.

7. Work with institutional research and data teams to collect relevant document of local needs to facilitate interventions such as early warning systems and correlate interventions with student persistence and retention.
8. Consider fundraising for and distribution of emergency aid across institutions, increasing efficiency and effectiveness and relieving campuses of unnecessary burdens. Many institutional emergency aid programs are relatively small and inadequately implemented. Common problems include:
  - A lack of a student-friendly application process that minimizes hassles for both students and their colleges
  - Limited staff capacity and resources to do effective outreach, and challenges moving from selection of emergency aid to distribution of emergency aid quickly
  - Difficulty selecting recipients in an equitable and efficient manner while recognizing the implicit bias compromising interactions with students
  - Difficulty navigating the conditions Title IV places on emergency aid
  - Struggles maintaining strong positive relationships with students while necessarily having to say no to many requests
  - Document the number of students who request services who don't receive assistance due to lack of funding to support needs statements

The Hope Center also offers the following additional supports for your efforts:

- An annual [national conference](#) focused on inspiration, education, and action
- An [assessment](#) of your campus supports for basic needs security
- [Guides and Tools](#) including how to assess basic needs on campus, a Beyond the Food Pantry series, and a digest of existing research on basic needs insecurity from around the country
- [Evaluations](#) of food and housing support programs

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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