



For College, Community, and Justice

[HOPE4COLLEGE.COM](https://HOPE4COLLEGE.COM)

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

## REPORT FOR UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I

A Hope Center Publication  
June 2021

# 2020 #REALCOLLEGE SURVEY RESULTS

## SYSTEM REPORT FOR UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I SYSTEM

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

June 2021

### OVERVIEW

Invitations to complete the questionnaire were sent by email to 48,133 students from the University of Hawai'i System and 1,016 students participated. Thus, the estimated response rate is 2.1%.

#### Students in the University of Hawai'i System told us that...

- 58% experienced at least one form of basic needs insecurity, including
  - 39% who experienced food insecurity in the prior 30 days,
  - 44% who experienced housing insecurity in the previous year, and
  - 14% who experienced homelessness in the previous year.

#### We also learned that...

- 24% had a close friend or family member who was sick with COVID-19, while 3% were sick with COVID-19 themselves.
- 38% of students exhibited at least moderate anxiety.
- 15% of students who experienced basic needs insecurity used emergency aid, but 45% had not heard of emergency aid programs on campus.
- 58% of students experiencing basic needs insecurity did not apply for campus supports because they did not know how.
- 55% 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)).*

## INTRODUCTION

Fall 2020 was an extraordinary time for colleges and universities in Hawai'i as the state continued to deal with the effects of the pandemic. Although Hawai'i had the fewest number of COVID-19 cases in the country, the strict measures that likely helped keep those numbers so low have created a challenging economic situation for many (The Washington Post, 2021). The state's unemployment rate peaked at almost 22% and remains high, at almost 8% (Hawai'i Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism, n.d.). Although the University of Hawai'i faced smaller enrollment declines than many other public institutions during the pandemic, enrollment at community colleges in the state was down more than 3% (University of Hawai'i News, 2020).

The consequences of the pandemic have magnified the importance of addressing students' basic needs. In response, the University of Hawai'i has increased emergency aid, providing students with additional support for their basic needs and, when possible, connecting them with community resources. In addition to existing supports like food pantries, the university is also working to inform students of their possible eligibility for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.

This report sheds a light on how students attending colleges and universities in Hawai'i fared given the extraordinary circumstances of fall 2020. Continued focus on supporting students' basic needs will ensure they are able to succeed as the repercussions of the pandemic linger.



## NEW ECONOMICS OF COLLEGE DURING THE PANDEMIC

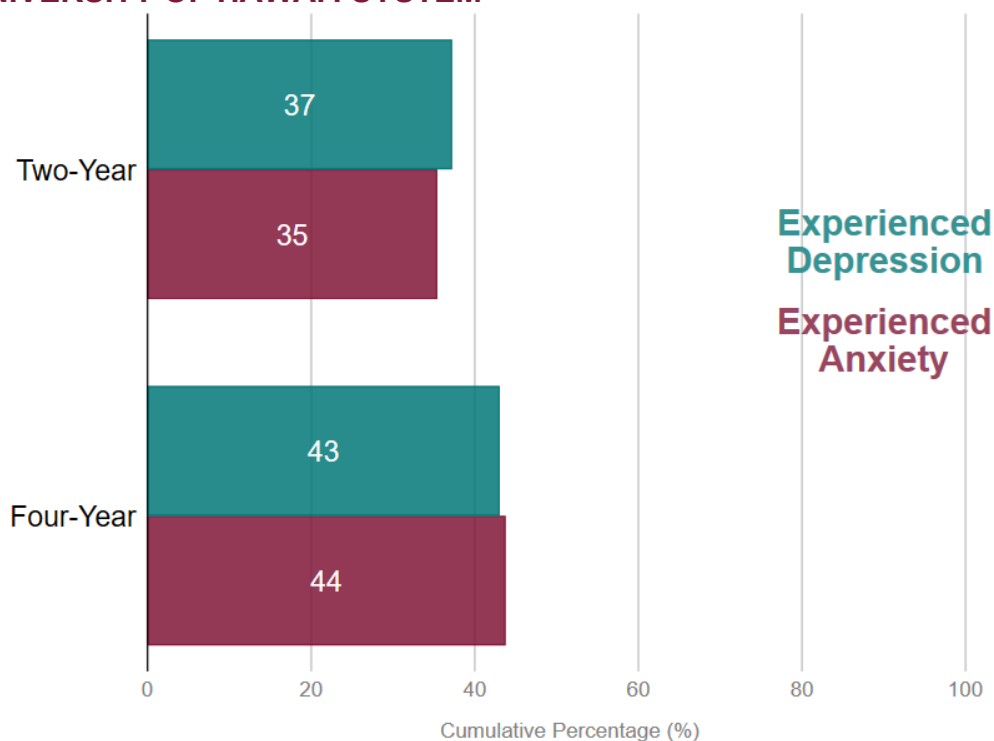
Students and families have struggled with the new economics of college for the past 20 years. Stagnant incomes, declining state support for higher education, college prices that stretch the budgets of all but the top earners, rising wealth and income inequality, and a threadbare social safety net have 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 38% of students in the University of Hawai'i System experienced at least moderate anxiety, while 39% experienced at least moderate depression (not shown). Students at four-year colleges were more likely to experience anxiety and depression compared to students at two-year colleges.

**FIGURE 1. PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION IN THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM**

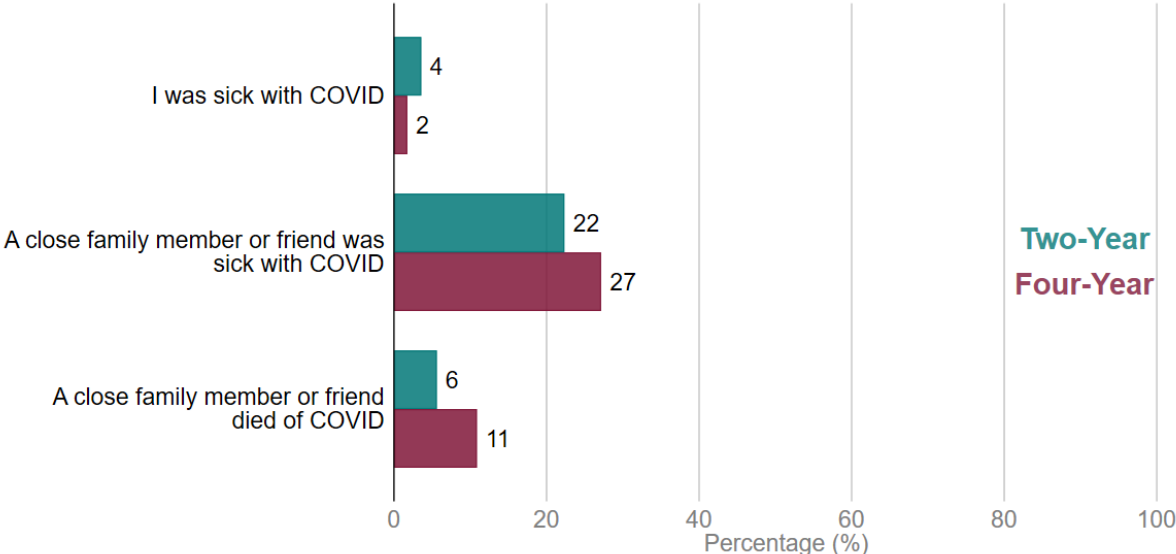


Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

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. In the University of Hawai'i System, 24% of students had a close friend or family member who was sick with COVID-19, while 3% were sick with COVID-19 themselves (not shown). Students at four-year colleges were more likely to have a close family member or friend die of COVID-19 compared to students at two-year colleges (Figure 2).

**FIGURE 2. PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH COVID-19 IN THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM**



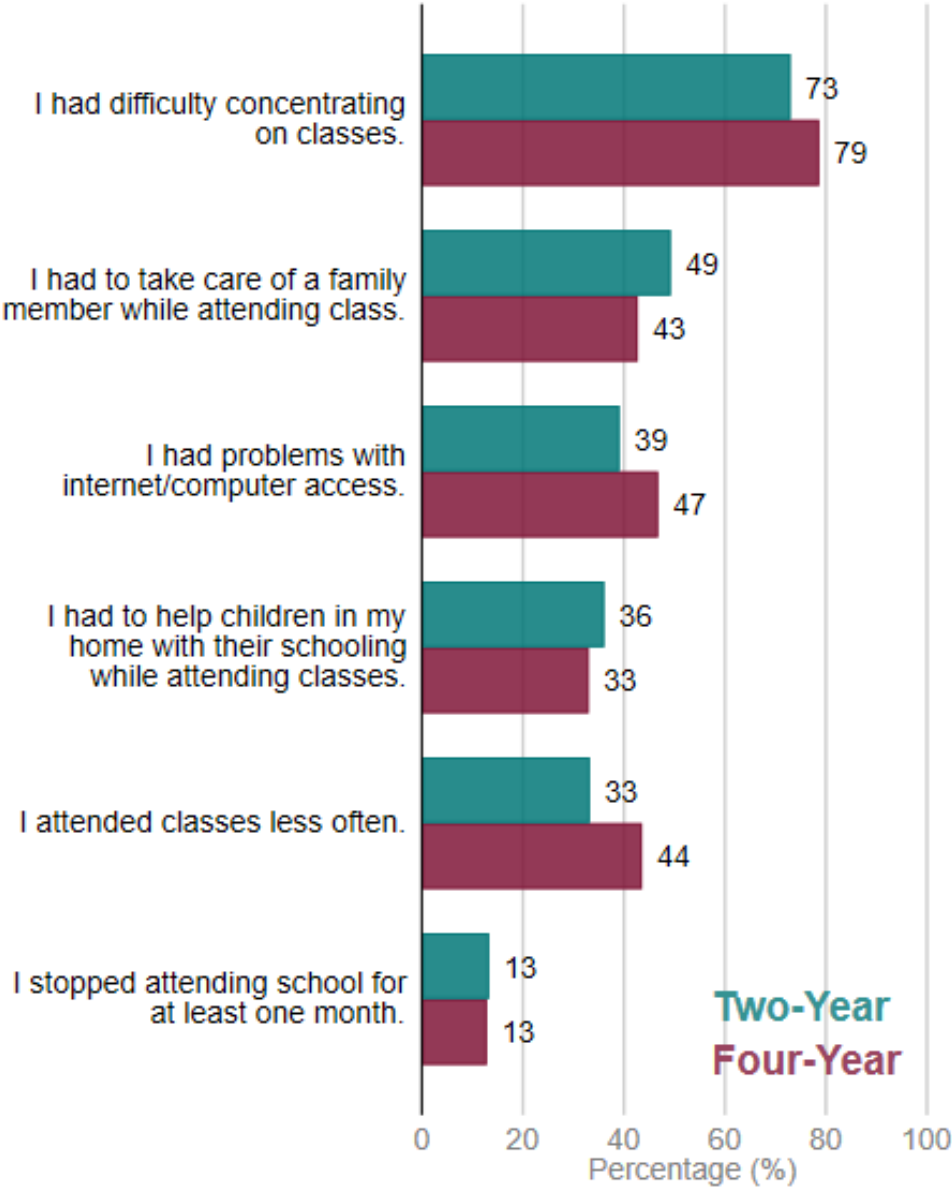
Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

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



Students in the University of Hawai'i System reported numerous challenges when asked to reflect on their experiences during the pandemic. As Figure 3 shows, about 75% had difficulty concentrating in classes and about 42% had problems with internet or computer access since the spring of 2020.

**FIGURE 3. OTHER CHALLENGES FACED SINCE SPRING 2020 DUE TO THE PANDEMIC IN THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I SYSTEM**



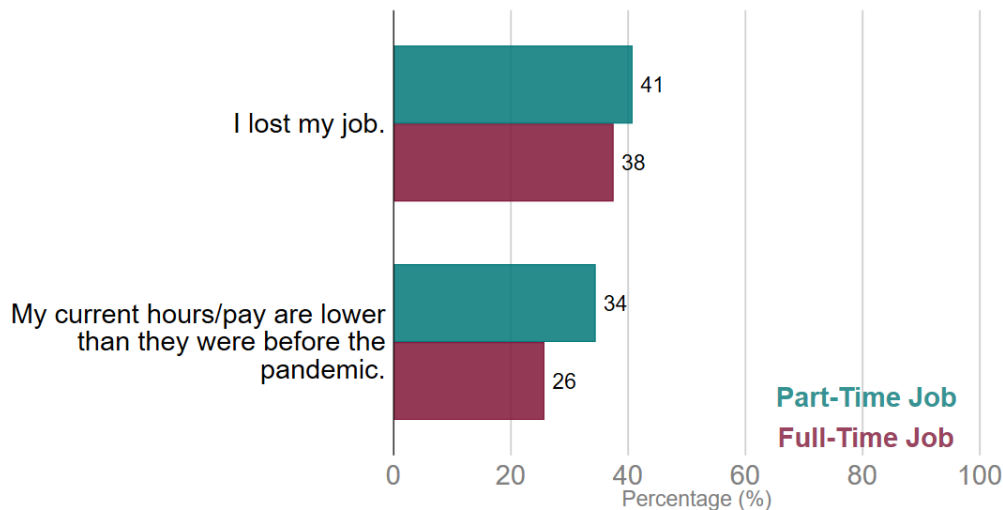
Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey  
 Notes: Results above are limited to students who were also enrolled in college in spring 2020. Some students experienced more than one of the challenges listed above. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.

## 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, overall, 41% of students with part-time jobs in the University of Hawai'i System lost their jobs. Rates were very similar between two-year and four-year colleges.

**FIGURE 4. JOB LOSS OR REDUCTION IN PAY OR HOURS, BY PRE-PANDEMIC JOB STATUS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I SYSTEM**



Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

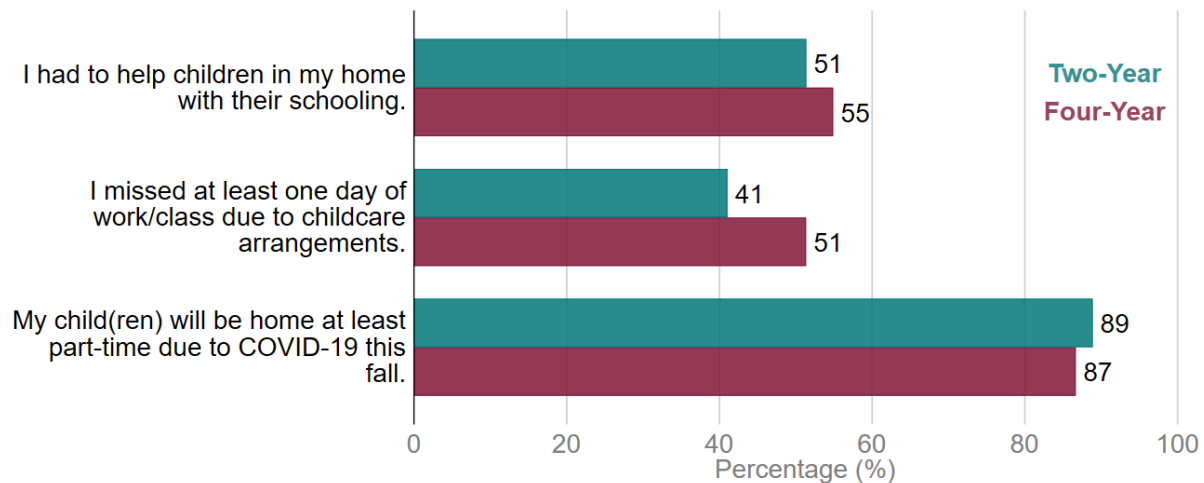
Notes: Results above are limited to students who were also enrolled in college in spring 2020 and had at least one job before the pandemic. Those with a full-time job worked 35 or more hours a week, whereas those with a part-time job worked less than 35 hours a week. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.



## FAMILIES

As the pandemic continued, schools and daycare centers closed. As a result, many parents—especially mothers—spent more time on childcare. In the University of Hawai'i System, 197 parenting students participated in the survey. When asked about their experiences during the spring 2020 term, 52% of parenting students helped their children with schooling while attending classes and 44% missed work or class due to childcare arrangements (not shown). Students at four-year colleges were more likely to miss class due to childcare compared to students at two-year colleges (Figure 5). During the fall 2020 term, 88% had children home from school at least part-time.

**FIGURE 5. CHALLENGES FACED BY PARENTING STUDENTS DUE TO THE PANDEMIC IN THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I SYSTEM**



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.





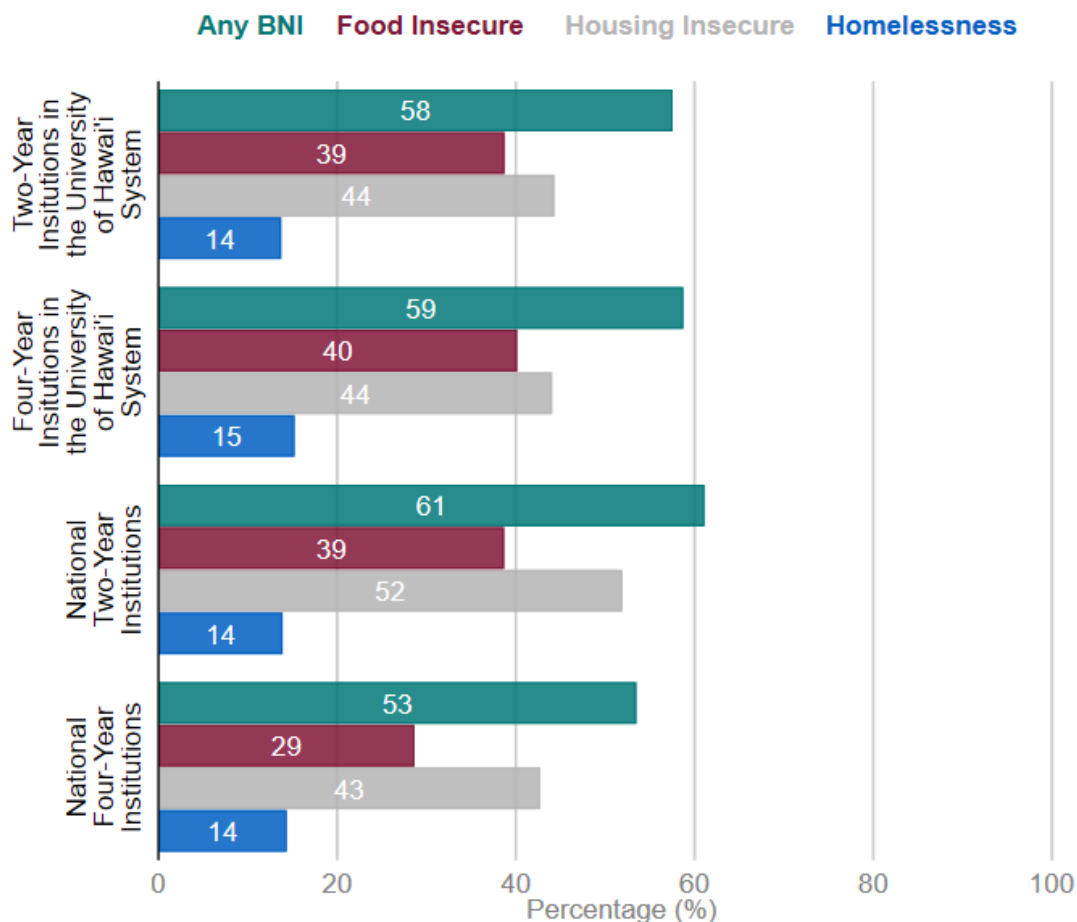
## BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY DURING THE PANDEMIC

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 in the University of Hawai'i System, about 58% of students at both two-year and four-year colleges experienced some form of basic needs insecurity. Students at two-year colleges in the University of Hawai'i System were less likely to experience any BNI compared to students at two-year colleges nationwide. Compared to students at four-year colleges nationwide, students at four-year colleges in the University of Hawai'i system were more likely to experience any BNI (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.

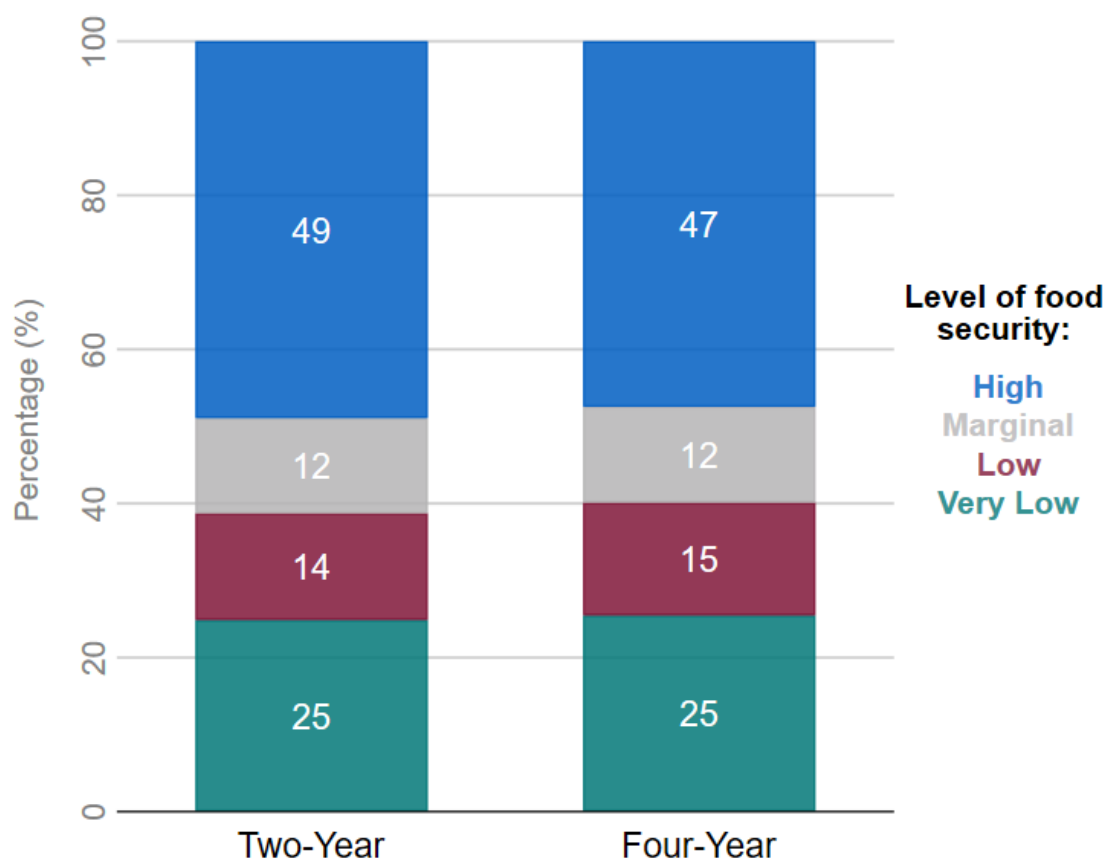
## FOOD INSECURITY

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 40% of survey respondents in the University of Hawai'i System experienced low or very low levels of food security (Figure 7).

Moreover, 40% of survey respondents could not afford to eat balanced meals and 43% worried about running out of food before they had money to buy more (not shown).

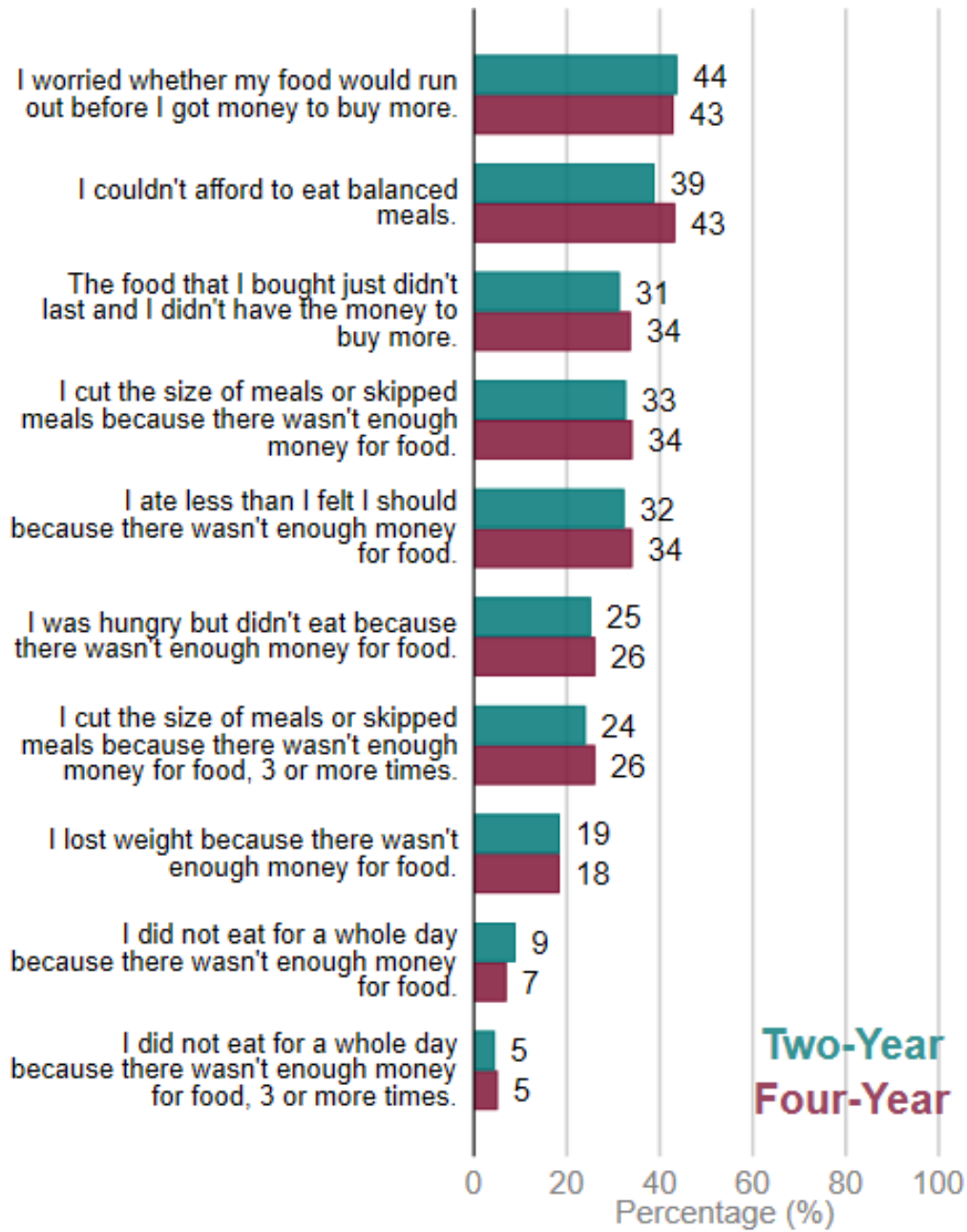
**FIGURE 7. LEVEL OF FOOD SECURITY AMONG SURVEY RESPONDENTS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM**



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 IN THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I SYSTEM**



Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

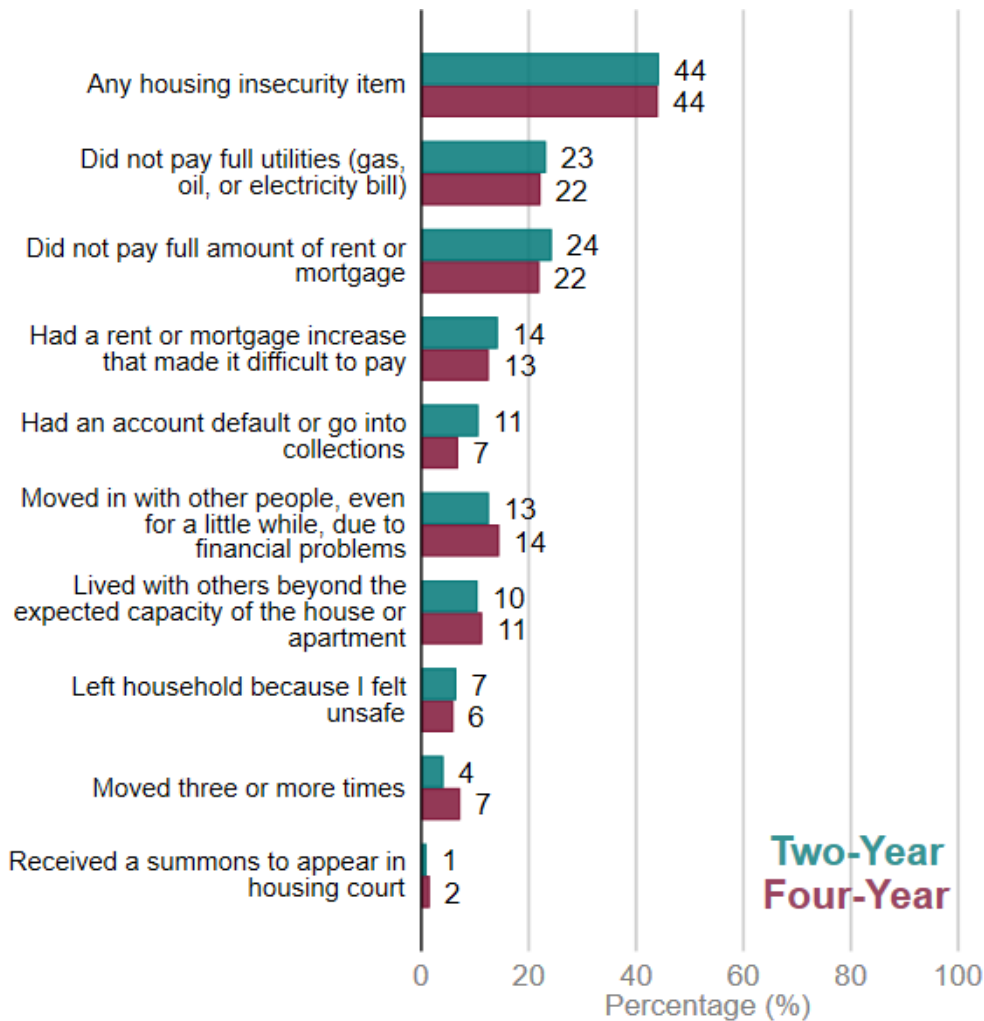
Notes: Some students experienced more than one of the circumstances listed above. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.

## 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 in the University of Hawai'i System? As displayed below, 44% of survey respondents experienced housing insecurity (Figure 9).

**FIGURE 9. HOUSING INSECURITY AMONG SURVEY RESPONDENTS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM**



Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

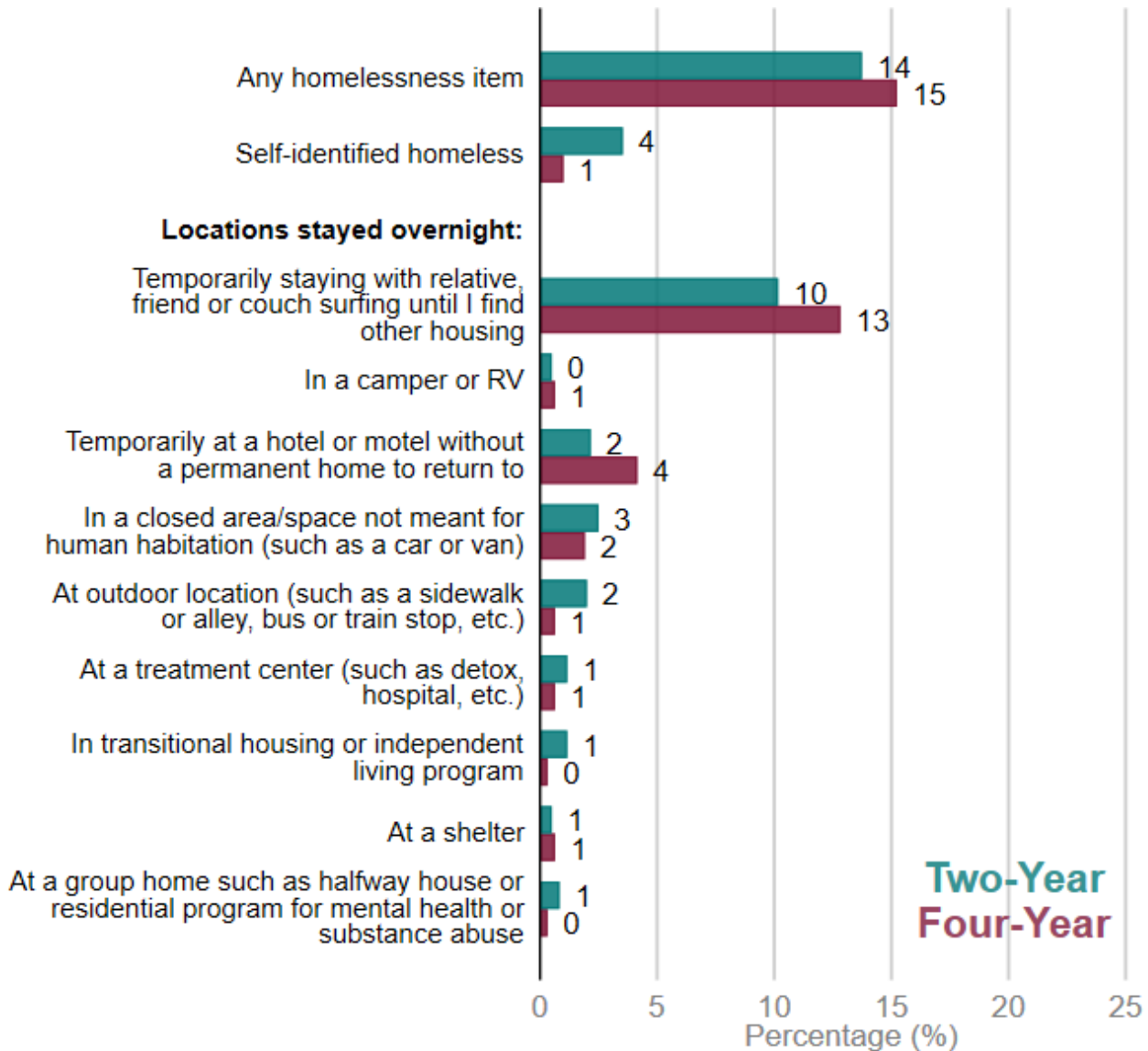
Notes: Some students may have experienced more than one of the circumstances listed above. For more details on how we measure housing insecurity, refer to the [online appendices](#) of the #RealCollege 2021 report. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.

## 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, approximately 15% of survey respondents in the University of Hawai'i System experienced homelessness or the conditions of homelessness (Figure 10).

**FIGURE 10. EXPERIENCES WITH HOMELESSNESS AMONG SURVEY RESPONDENTS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM**



Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

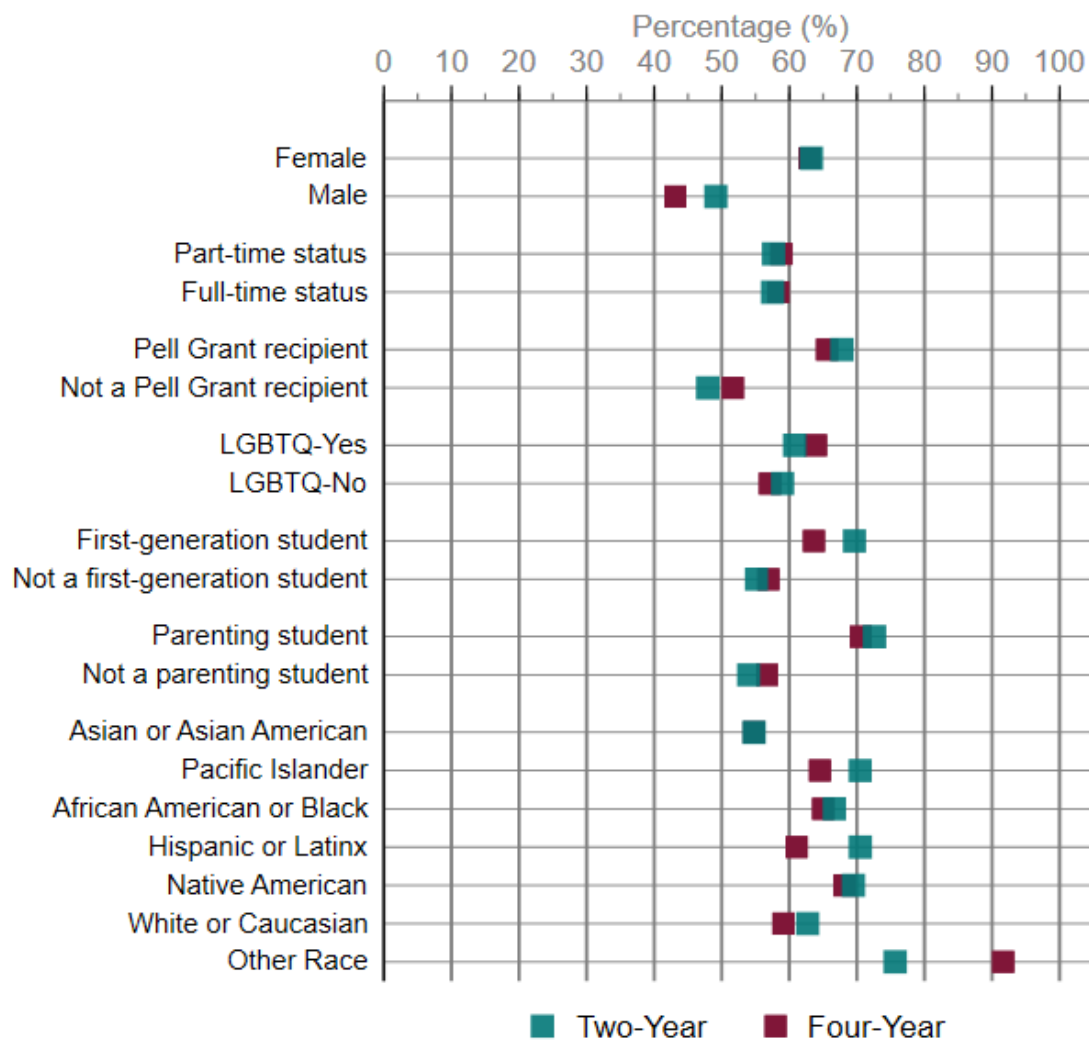
Notes: Some students may have experienced more than one of the circumstances listed above. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.

## 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. Female students were more likely to experience basic needs insecurity compared to male students. Pell grant recipients were more likely to experience basic needs insecurity compared to non-Pell grant recipients. Parenting students were more likely to experience basic needs insecurity compared to non-parenting students.

**FIGURE 11. DISPARITIES IN BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM**



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.

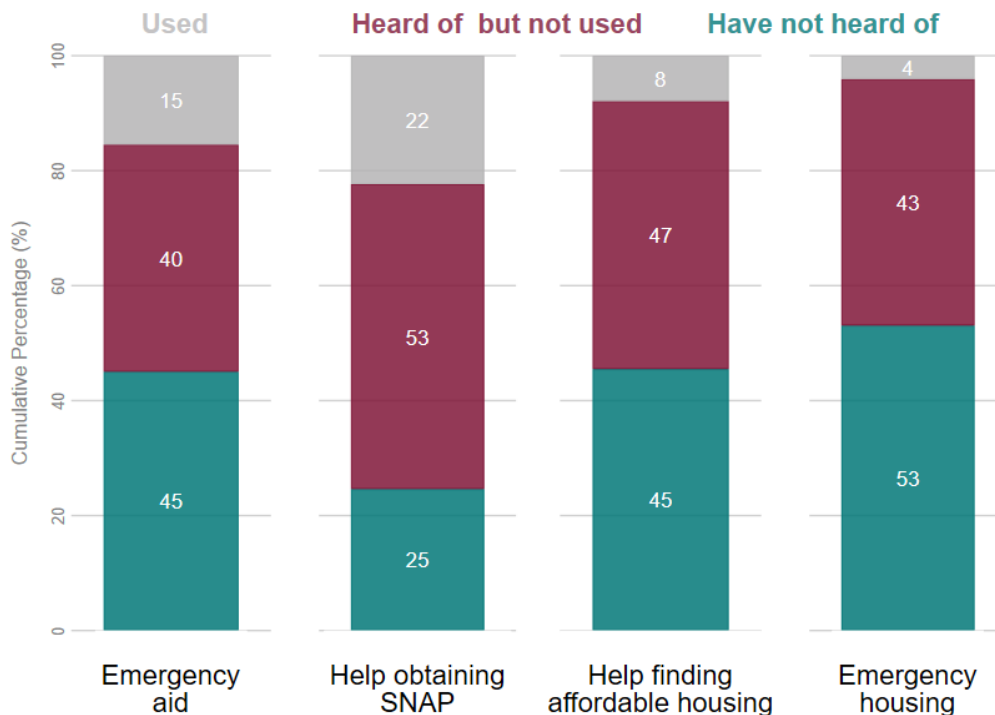
## UTILIZATION OF SUPPORTS

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 accessed 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 in the University of Hawai'i System, utilization of campus supports was generally uncommon. Only 15% of students experiencing basic needs insecurity used emergency financial aid and 22% received help in obtaining SNAP benefits (Figure 12).

**FIGURE 12. USE OF CAMPUS SUPPORTS AMONG STUDENTS WHO EXPERIENCED BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I SYSTEM**

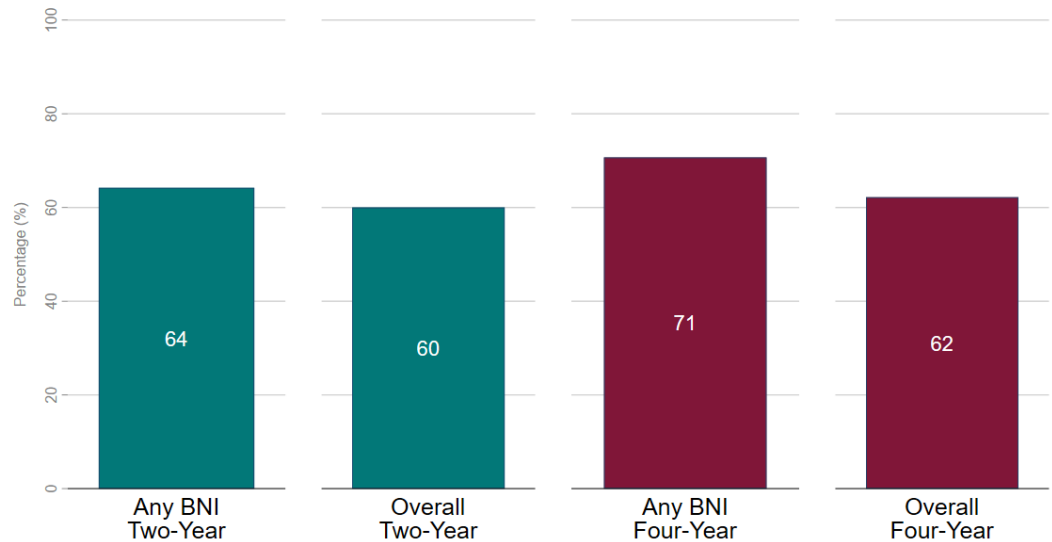


Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

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, 67% indicated that their experience was stressful (not shown). Students at four-year colleges who were experiencing basic needs insecurity were more likely to experience stress when applying for emergency aid compared to students experiencing basic needs insecurity at two-year colleges (Figure 13).

**FIGURE 13. STRESS WHEN SEEKING EMERGENCY AID, BY BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY STATUS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM**



Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

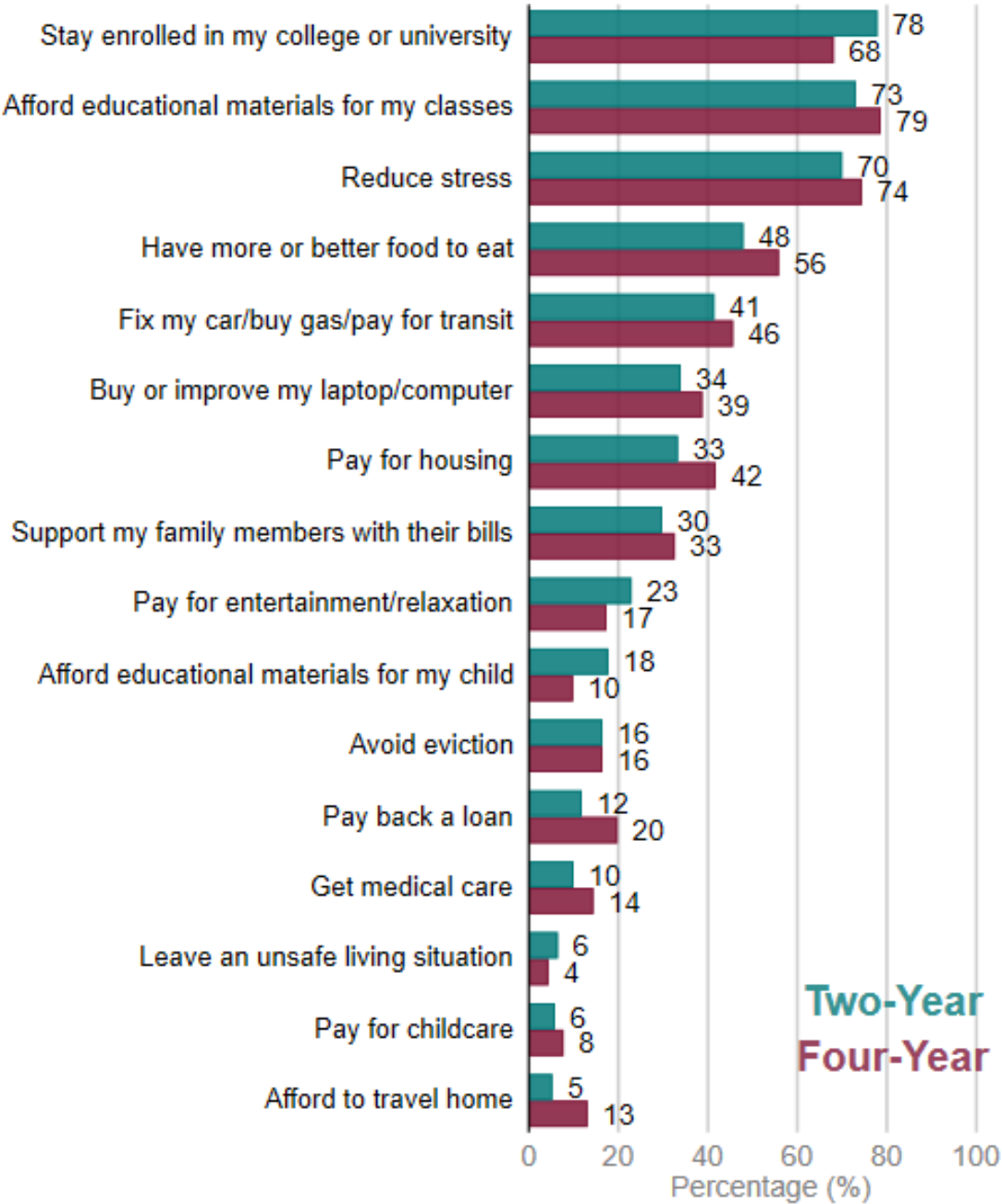
Notes: Rates above are among students who applied for CARES or non-CARES emergency aid funding this year. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.





For students who did receive emergency aid, the extra, flexible funds were critical. Many students in the University of Hawai'i System used funds to stay enrolled, afford educational materials, and reduce stress (Figure 14). Compared to students at two-year colleges, students at four-year colleges were more likely to use emergency aid to pay for housing and transit. Students at two-year colleges were more likely to use emergency aid to stay enrolled in college and afford educational materials for their children compared to students at four-year colleges.

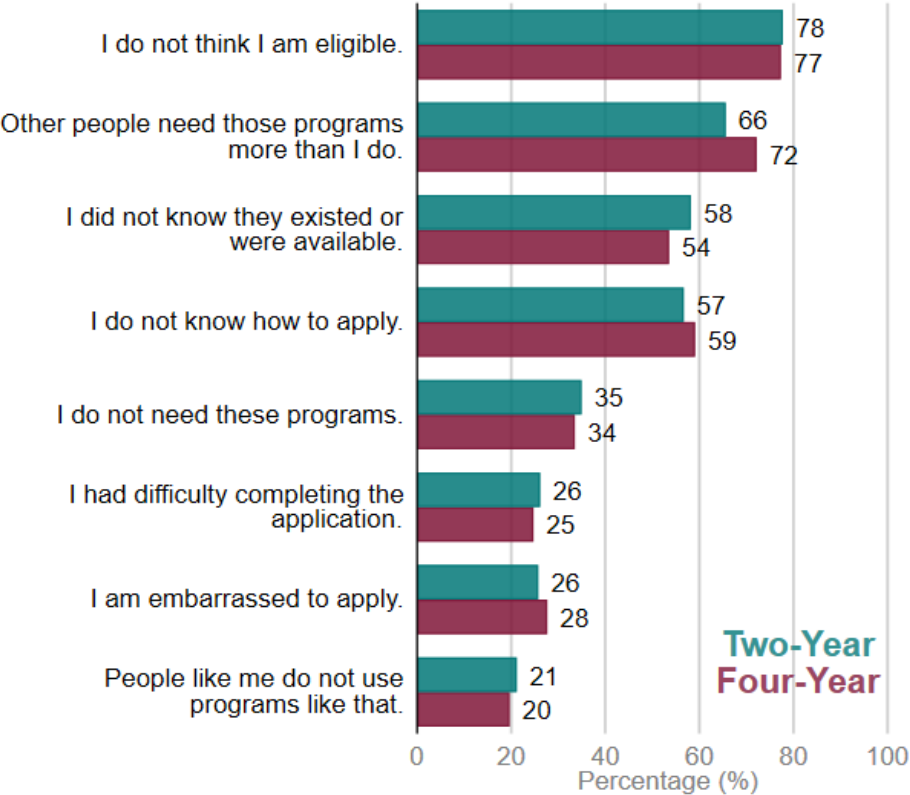
**FIGURE 14. TOP USES OF EMERGENCY AID FUNDING IN THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM**



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, more than half did not know how to apply and over two-thirds thought other students needed the resources more (Figure 15).

**FIGURE 15. REASONS WHY STUDENTS EXPERIENCING BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY DID NOT USE CAMPUS SUPPORTS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I SYSTEM**

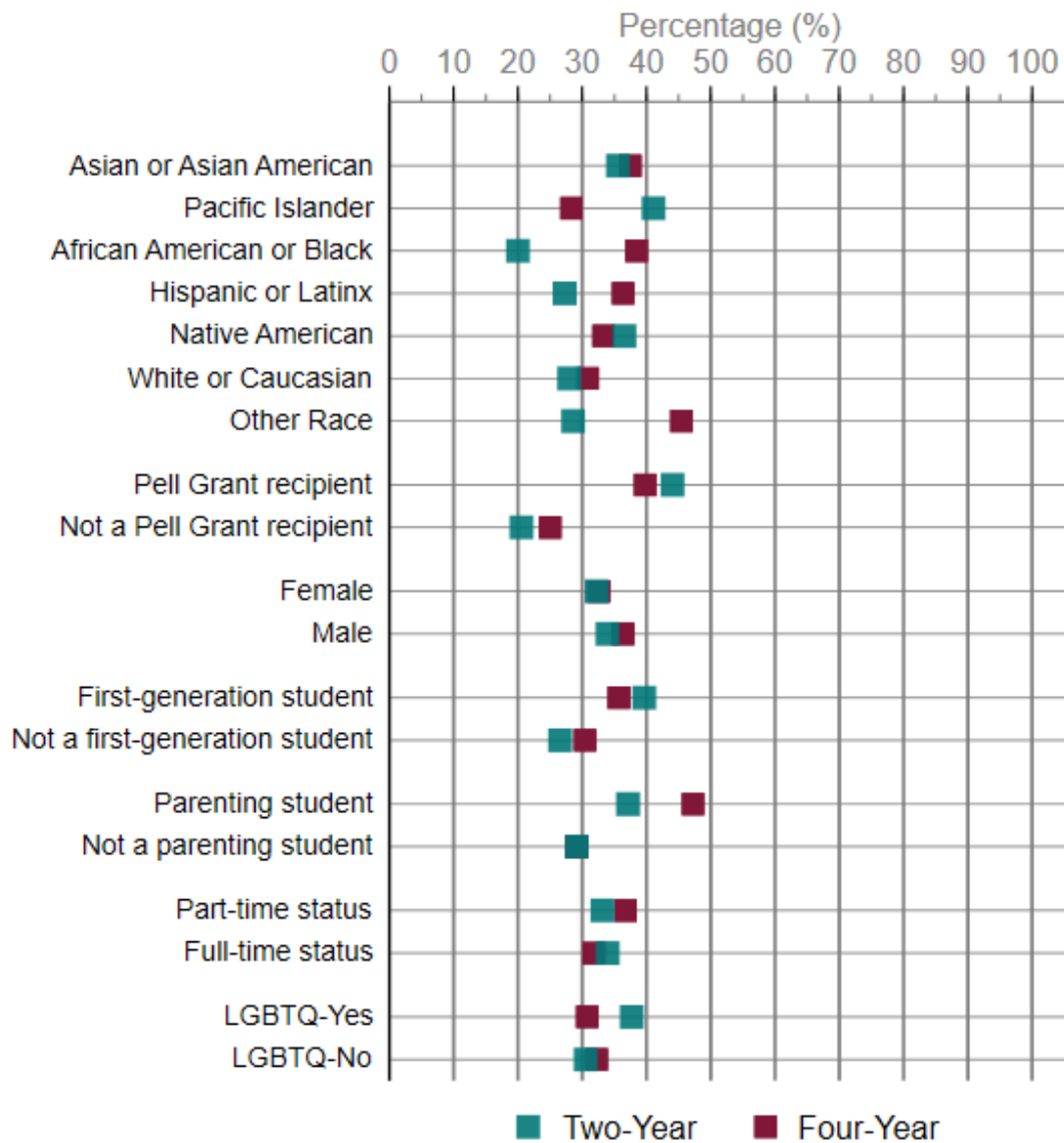


Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Some students have 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. Black and Latinx students at four-year colleges were more likely to use campus supports compared to Black and Latinx students at two-year colleges.

**FIGURE 16. GAPS IN THE USE OF CAMPUS SUPPORTS AMONG STUDENTS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM WHO EXPERIENCED ANY BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY**



Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

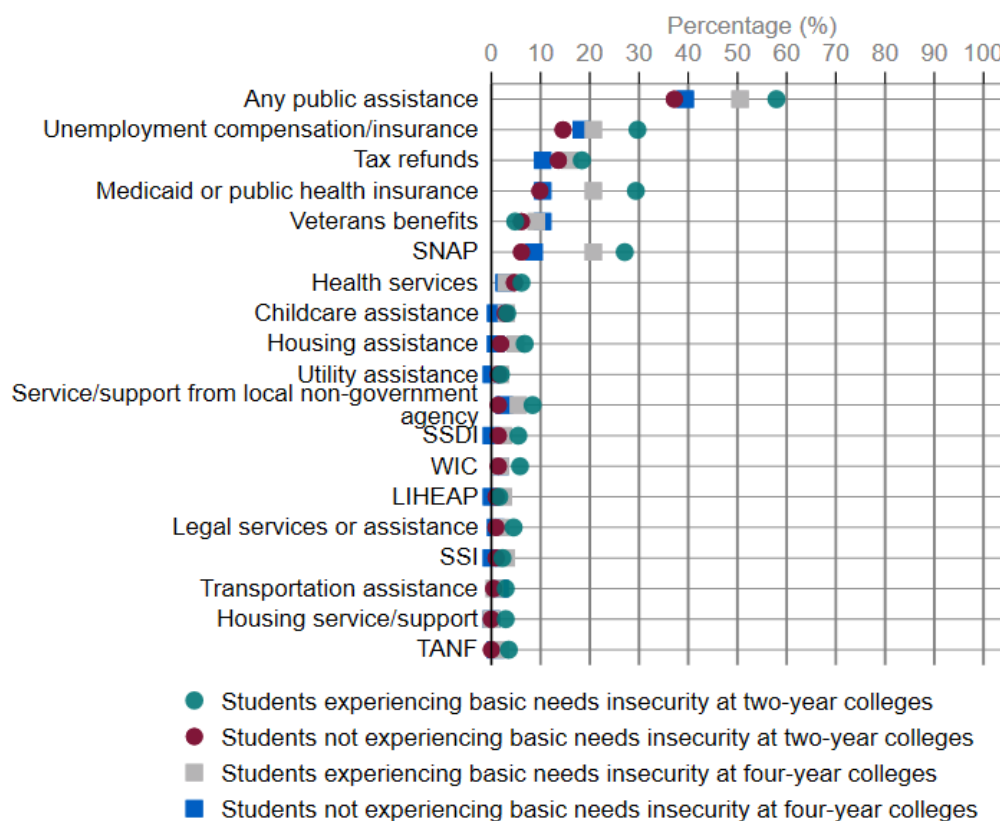
Notes: Classifications of gender identity and racial/ethnic background are not mutually exclusive. Students could self-identify with multiple classifications. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.

## 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, bi-weekly amount of cash assistance to families with no income. Similarly, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is meant for workers who meet the qualifying criteria. To qualify for SNAP, students must meet income and asset criteria. A new, temporary SNAP rule allows \$0 expected family contribution (EFC) and work-study eligible students to be potentially eligible to receive the benefit.

Among 2020 #RealCollege Survey respondents who were experiencing basic needs insecurity, 55% 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 THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I SYSTEM**



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 and certificates. Colleges can directly support students in a number of ways, including:

- Normalizing the conversation about basic needs by discussing it at various points during the advising and counseling process, as well as during enrollment and in the classroom. By providing students with information about existing supports from day one and in an ongoing bases, they will feel more empowered to seek support when and if they need it.
- Lifting benefits access beyond SNAP (TANF, WIC, Medicaid, unemployment, utility assistance programs, childcare subsidies, etc.) and providing students with assistance to complete the application process so they can focus on learning while they get the support they need.
- Increase student supports utilization by increasing student awareness. This can be done by engaging and educating faculty, staff, administrators, and student leaders to disseminate the information.
- Centralizing student support services through the implementation of a one-stop center. This simplifies how students access the assistance available and makes referrals easier and more effective, allowing faculty and staff to focus on doing their job.
- Activating student involvement through the implementation of benefit navigators/advocates, or peer-to-peer programs.
- Providing professional development for staff, and engaging the basic needs task force in designing basic needs programming.

## REFERENCES

The Washington Post. (2021). [\*National coronavirus cases\*](#).

Hawai'i Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism. (n.d.). [\*Labor market dashboard\*](#).

University of Hawai'i News. (2020, October 15). [\*UH stems enrollment decline despite pandemic and economic fallout\*](#).

## 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).

## APPENDIX

**TABLE A. CHARACTERISTICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM**

		TWO-YEAR COLLEGES		FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES	
		NUMBER OF STUDENTS	PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS
<b>GENDER IDENTITY</b>	Male	116	22	51	18
	Female	392	75	219	79
	Valid Responses	520	100	278	100
<b>SEXUAL ORIENTATION</b>	Is LGBTQ	102	19	61	22
	Is not LGBTQ	422	81	217	78
	Valid Responses	524	100	278	100
<b>RACE &amp; ETHNICITY</b>	Asian or Asian American	272	52	146	52
	Pacific Islander	183	35	93	33
	African American or Black	15	3	20	7
	Hispanic or Latinx	78	15	36	13
	Native American	59	11	44	16
	White or Caucasian	228	44	137	49
	Other	37	7	12	4
	Valid Responses	519	100	279	100
<b>AGE</b>	18 to 20	151	30	104	38
	21 to 25	97	19	82	30
	26 and older	262	51	88	32
	Valid Responses	510	100	275	100
<b>ENROLLMENT</b>	Full-time	299	47	247	72
	Part-time	343	53	94	28
	Valid Responses	642	100	341	100
<b>YEARS IN COLLEGE</b>	Less than 1	180	28	55	16
	1 to 2	216	34	92	27
	3 or more	247	38	190	56
	Valid Responses	643	100	337	100
<b>RECEIVES PELL GRANT</b>	Yes	281	46	159	51
	No	328	54	154	49
	Valid Responses	609	100	313	100

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

## **PARTICIPATING COLLEGES**

Hawai'i Community College

Honolulu Community College

Kapi'olani Community College

Leeward Community College

Maui College

University of Hawai'i at Hilo

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

University of Hawai'i – West O'ahu

Windward Community College