



College Student Food Insecurity in Oregon: Listening Circle and Survey Thematic Analysis

Listening circles, and survey written, administered and facilitated by the Hunger-Free Campuses team at Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon: Chris Baker, Venus Barnes, and Chloe Eberhardt, with support from Emily Wanous at the Oregon Student Association.

Data analysis and report written by: Heather King, MSW, Ph.D. Candidate, Tjorven Sievers, Ph.D Candidate, Jonathan Ruff, Ph.D. Candidate and Stuty Maskey, Ph.D, Oregon State University.

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1. Introduction

There is no national consensus on the prevalence of college student food insecurity in the United States, though a recent meta-analysis calculated an average (unweighted mean) of 43.5 percent for 52,000 postsecondary students (Nazmi, et.al., 2019). While this figure alone reveals a troubling situation in higher education, the urgency of it becomes even more apparent when considering the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates much less -- 11.1 percent -- of the general public is food insecure, or lacks "access, at all times, to enough food for an active, healthy life" (USDA, ERS, 2019). This means college students have difficulty in accessing enough nutritious food at nearly four times the rate of the general public.

Consistent themes have emerged in reports on college student food insecurity, including students' struggles to meet their 'basic needs packages' -- food, housing, transportation, medical and childcare expenses -- along with skyrocketing tuition and fees (Goldrick-Rab, et.al., 2020; Goldrick-Rab, et.al., 2018; Crutchfield and Maguire, 2018). In addition, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the most effective food insecurity mitigating program in the United States, imposes specific eligibility restrictions on college students, often making it more difficult for them to qualify than non-students of comparable income and resources (USDA, FNS, 2013). This report highlights common themes expressed in listening circles hosted in early 2020 by Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon (PHFO) at four community colleges and three public four-year universities across the state. These were complimented by a separate basic needs survey focusing on the same topics (see *2020 Basic Needs Survey and Listening Circle Questionnaire: Participant Characteristics*). Students consistently identified several issues in both data collection methods, including inadequate resources to meet basic needs; barriers to accessing basic needs programs that did exist, including SNAP; negative impacts of food insecurity on students' lives; feelings of disconnection, lack of care and being misperceived by decision makers; how support programs *do* help when functional; and suggestions for how these programs, including SNAP, can assist students even more effectively in achieving their goals of 'paying the bills' while completing college degrees.

This report utilizes direct quotes from students and administrators across Oregon who participated in these listening circles or responded to the PHFO survey. Whenever possible, quotes are attributed to the institutions participants and respondents attended. These will be highlighted throughout the discussion below and parenthetically cited using "LC participant" to indicate a listening circle participant, and "respondent" to indicate a survey respondent.

2. Barriers to Accessing Supports: Campus Programs and SNAP

While college students' struggles with meeting basic needs, including food insecurity, are becoming more apparent on a national level, the details of *how* and *why* they struggle to access food is still being discovered. As such, listening circles are important to gain better understanding. Participants in circles hosted by PHFO consistently expressed difficulty in accessing enough nutritious food over the course of their academic experiences. Barriers to this access included inadequate basic needs programming on campuses; uncertainty about service delivery or appropriate access to resources on and off campus; lack of support from administrative and government personnel in navigating these programs; and negative experiences with support programs when attempts were made to access them. These negative experiences primarily revolved around stigmatization, but some participants also discussed stressful experiences related to the process of applying for SNAP, such as fear of negative consequences, like deportation; cumbersome paperwork; confusion over eligibility requirements; and explicit eligibility barriers.

2.1 Inadequate Basic Needs Programming on Campuses

Among the most common articulations among students, across transcripts, centered on difficulties in meeting basic needs while simultaneously going to college. Many students cited the high cost of living, as well as rising levels of tuition, during the listening circles. There simply wasn't enough money in the budgets to cover educational, housing, food, childcare and transportation expenses. Yet some also expressed awareness that a college education was their best chance at a decent quality of life.

It's hard but ultimately important to go to college, it's unfortunately also very expensive. (Portland Community College, respondent)

Several participants also discussed how their campuses lacked adequate basic needs programs, and how the resources that were available to them were sometimes difficult to access, such as food pantries that were only open select hours at non-central locations, poorly advertised and/or did not offer enough appropriate foods. Lack of housing and educational supports often blended into discussions on food insecurity, as the need to spend limited budgets on rent or textbooks impeded their abilities to purchase enough food. Housing and books came at set prices, so cutting back on groceries became the only viable option. Lack of basic needs supports –including for food, then -- led to inadequate budgets to purchase enough nutrition on their own.

College is extremely expensive and things like food go by the wayside. We give up necessities to be able to afford all the costs of college. Our safety and basic needs are ignored. (Oregon State University, respondent)

We don't have enough resources for everyone on campus. The resources are not advertised as [they] should be (unidentified campus, respondent)

2.2 Inadequate Campus Assistance and Outreach

In addition to lack of adequate basic needs programming on campuses, students also discussed difficulty in navigating appropriate systems to identify and access those resources. Simply put, they were often unsure, unaware or confused about where to go, who to ask and how to find out what was available to them. Several participants also discussed how inconsistent they found the knowledge of staff on campus regarding these resources.

Most of the staff and faculty on campus are not even aware that student resources exist! Students pay for different student services through their tuition and fees, but they don't know where that money goes or why they're even charged... (Portland State University, respondent)

2.3 Confusion Over SNAP Eligibility Requirements

Listening circle and survey participants also articulated confusion or misperceptions about their eligibility for SNAP. Several transcripts from these listening circles revealed dialogue among the students themselves trying to assist one another in understanding who qualifies for the program and under what conditions. Some did not apply due to overtly incorrect assumptions about eligibility criteria, while others chose not to apply due to lack of clarity. Some, in turn, linked this back to inadequate visible support programs on campuses-- expressing confusion about where to go to ask questions and rarely encountering visible SNAP outreach.

My job on campus is not through work-study so I figured it wasn't worth it for me to [apply]. And because I wasn't really sure how I would go about it or who to talk to. I've learned a lot more now having sat here with students for SNAP. I thought I didn't quite need it and also, I wasn't sure how to go about it. (Western Oregon University, LC participant)

Even if you do know when or where [to go], all the paperwork and legalities can be really confusing and overwhelming. Every different service has different requirements. (Linn-Benton Community College, LC participant)

2.4 Explicit SNAP Eligibility Barriers

Some students chose not to apply for SNAP due to confusion or incorrect assumptions about the program, while others had investigated, or applied for, SNAP and discovered they were, in fact, ineligible. Some traditional-aged students discovered they were disqualified due to their parents' incomes, even though their

families did not provide food. Other eligibility barriers identified by students included graduate students' stricter requirements (than undergraduates'), age limits and international student status. International students expressed specific concerns over this, as ineligibility for SNAP, combined with work restrictions, created situations in which affording adequate food for themselves, and sometimes their families, became highly stressful.

Well I can't apply for snap because DHS told me that they are going to base [my income] from my dad's income. (Linn-Benton Community College, respondent)

I don't totally understand why graduate students are not included in the legislation. It's a huge problem. I don't even tend to send my graduate students to the SNAP signups. I do tell them but I say you probably won't get them. (University of Oregon, LC participant)

I have experienced this personally so that's why I know about it; you're no longer considered a student once you turn 50, no matter what kind of student you are. Whether you are an undergraduate or graduate, you cannot hold student status any longer. Those are the legislative barriers... (University of Oregon, LC participant)

(...) From the international students' standpoint is that you can't work, you can only work on campus 20 hours a week. You need international work study, which is limited and hard to get. It's not the normal application. It's often hard to get a job as an international student as well. You don't qualify for any government benefits and even things I might qualify for, I don't want to apply for because I don't want to violate my status and get deported. (University of Oregon, LC participant)

2.5 Negative Experiences Accessing Support, including SNAP

Another consistently expressed experience among students participating in PHFO listening circles, as well as the survey, was stigma around accessing basic needs supports. Many discussed how difficult it was to overcome their own reservations, or how difficult it was to get other students to join them in going to the pantry or apply for SNAP, due to negative stereotypes, fear or pride. These experiences resulted in fewer students having enough nutritious food.

Pride is always an issue when you're speaking to the realities of food insecurity. Some people are unwilling to utilize services designed to help deal with food gaps because they don't want the stigma of receiving handouts or don't think the program is for people like them. (Portland Community College, respondent)

Stigma deters people from using the resources [...] This leads to lack of access. (Portland Community College, LC participant)

Some students also expressed fear of relatives being deported if they applied for SNAP and confusion about what undocumented family members meant for them. This prevented some students from even considering an application; instead, they accepted the reality of food insecurity.

My dad is undocumented, and that comes along with a lot of fear about putting his name on government papers. [...] So he can't get any benefits for us. [...] Am I a dependent or not? (Linn-Benton Community College, respondent).

I'm scared to apply for benefits. I am an international student. I'm scared if anything happens and my family is broken up and...I will be deported... It's so hard to find relevant information. Everything I need, I have to navigate myself. It's hard. (University of Oregon, LC participant)

Others found the SNAP application experience so frustrating or off-putting they stopped the application before it was processed or did not maintain the paperwork necessary to keep their benefits. This led to lack of program participation or attrition, even for those who qualified or were likely to qualify.

I started the application for SNAP but was unable to finish it. I think the application process is very long and it takes a lot of information in order to even submit it. There also aren't enough support specialists who can help you with any gray areas in your application. (Portland State University, respondent)

I decided to go to college and get an education so I didn't have to rely on the SNAP program to feed me, and they kicked me off without enough service to allow me to eat until I found a job. (Columbia Gorge Community College, respondent).

3. Negative Impacts of Food Insecurity

While the above section discusses existing resources for students in Oregon and the various barriers that can prevent them from seeking and receiving support, this section focuses on how participants articulated the negative impacts of their lived experiences of food insecurity. Importantly, students refer both to lack of *enough* food in the immediate sense, as well as to the challenges of being unable to access enough *healthy* food on a regular basis. Stigma, again, also showed itself here-- not just in how it affected students' willingness to access programs, but in how they felt viewed by others. Other disturbances linked with food insecurity voiced by students included

decreased academic performance, lower physical well-being and declining mental health, as exemplified by this quote:

You should know the incredible time commitment and stress that comes with being a student today. There is no ability during a term to shift focus away from classes [...] If you don't have any money for food, you have to eat something that doesn't quite adequately nourish, or go hungry and try to keep working on classes and attending school. (Portland State University, respondent)

In addition, it should be noted that it was often difficult to disentangle the negative impacts of food insecurity, specifically, from the difficulties associated with meeting other basic needs, such as housing, childcare and transportation. For low-income students, this is a complex struggle, full of heart wrenching trade-offs and high stress. While this section touches on individual factors, these decision-making processes are described in more detail in the next section.

3.1. Impacts on Academic Performance

"If you're giving me 60 pages to read in a day, I do not have the time. I'm trying to eat" (Western Oregon University, LC participant)

Central to several discussions in these listening circles was the detrimental effect food insecurity had on the quality of participants' academic performance. Students repeatedly pointed out how they struggled to maintain focus in class due to lack of nutrition: quite simply, they were hungry or distracted by the fact they had yet to secure a source of food for the day or week. As a consequence, some students expressed an inability to retain information and became concerned about 'making the grade.' One student summarized this situation as follows:

When I'm not getting enough nutrients into my body, I'm more likely to not feel energized to go to class. So, if I do go to class, I'm not learning anything. If I stay home, I'm being penalized for not going even though it's the same result. (Western Oregon University, LC participant)

In this context, participants also referred to feeling overwhelmed by having to manage coursework and paid employment simultaneously. Some, for instance, noted the inability to complete all of their academic assignments due to time spent at multiple jobs. Yet food was simply unaffordable otherwise. At the same time, pressure was mounting to complete their classes in order to graduate on time. Participants also pointed out that the original goal of attending college – obtaining a higher education – had become eclipsed by the struggle of surviving day-to-day. One student described this experience as follows:

The education doesn't even matter anymore. It's just doing what you have to do to make sure that (...) mark looks good enough on a piece of paper so someone can

go, ok, you can work here so you can survive. That's the end of the story. That's not okay. (Clackamas Community College, LC participant)

3.2. Impact on Students' Health

Both participants in the listening circles, as well as respondents to the survey, consistently indicated that their physical and mental health were negatively impacted by food insecurity. While these two are closely intertwined, they will be described separately in this report to best illustrate the specific challenges associated with each.

3.2.1. Physical health

Closely connected to impacts on academic performances, students noted headaches, lack of concentration and exhaustion due to an insufficient intake of nutritious food. Furthermore, participants referred to time constraints resulting from also having to make a living, which prevented them from taking care of their physical well-being.

Some of us have to work so much to afford to make ends meet between rent and food. It's not just a big stress school-wise that affects your academics but affects your health. I have high blood pressure that I work with all the time and it's so hard to lose weight because when I do have time that's open, it has to be used on homework. I have to sit down and do homework. I can't get up and go take a walk or go exercise...because there's something else I have to do in 20 minutes (Western Oregon University, LC participant)

It is important to note that in this context, students also described a kind of 'vicious cycle,' wherein the stress of school and making ends meet compounded to increase the likelihood of becoming physically – and mentally – ill:

The mental exhaustion heightens stress and anxiety which makes it difficult for students to focus on their course material and homework. The added stress can have a direct effect on their immune system, which increases the probability of illness being introduced throughout the entire campus....including staff and instructors (Portland Community College, respondent).

3.2.2. Mental health

Students also described anxiety and stress associated with food insecurity, hindering their learning processes. While some participants specifically pointed to the negative impacts of food and other basic needs insecurities on mental health, others expressed concerns through their use of language. For instance, one student referred to life circumstances as "dark"¹. More referred to being put under immense pressure to focus on their schoolwork while also balancing worry over how to fulfill their

¹ Listening Circle Participant (Lane Community College)

intersecting basic needs.

I would say mental health is real and it's a very big issue for folks. Whether they be freshmen, whether they be people returning, it's just a really hard thing to understand and comprehend (Lane Community College, LC participant).

It plays on your psyche [and] how do you focus on your schoolwork when you're trying so hard just to survive? (Lane Community College, LC participant)

Students [are] worrying about their money running out before rent is due, having to skip meals, or not being able to focus in class because of hunger, or having to skip class because they're having to work extra shifts. (Portland Community College, respondent)

3.3. Marginalization

Another theme repeatedly expressed by participants was marginalization -- feeling like outsiders to the student community. This sense of 'otherness' was described in relation to the lifestyle of working paid employment to meet basic needs, while also putting many hours into coursework. Some referred to reliance on support services, such as food pantries, and how this created a disconnect from other students. Many described feeling isolated or solitary -- that their struggles differentiated them from others on campus. In some instances, participants expressed overall lack of community. One LC participant recounted the experience as follows:

They [struggling students] don't communicate with one another. They live their own lives because they don't got time, they don't got resources, they don't have money, they don't have things to be able to hang out and be just part of a community with one another. Lane Community College, LC participant)

In particular, some participants articulated wanting to be able to treat themselves from time to time, or to participate in extracurricular activities usually only accessible to more privileged students.

Sometimes you want the same meal as somebody else. If you're not able to get that, you feel less than that person. (Clackamas Community College, LC participant)

You just feel really bad that you want to treat yourself. I love my self-care and it's taught me that self-care helps you find your self love. You can't really do that when you can't treat yourself once in a while. That lingering fact that I have to pay this, or I owe this...this student loan debt is going up. You can't ever relax. When the term's over, you gotta worry about another damn term coming in. (Lane Community College, LC participant)

3.4. Living with Food Insecurity Means Living From Day-to-Day

As a result of the double burden associated with the stress of completing a college degree while struggling for basic needs -- a burden not shared equally by more privileged students -- individuals may be prevented from looking ahead much further than the immediate future. It is difficult to productively plan for a job one may have years later when the possibility of going hungry, becoming homeless or losing financial aid looms large. In particular, there appears to be more references to the struggle of living day-to-day among community college participants than those at four-year institutions. While the sample size of the listening circles is small (n=7), this is a potentially relevant observation and worthy of further examination. This overall feeling of insecurity and stress is exemplified by the following statement:

It's overwhelming. I got to work and I bust my ass until 1, 2 in the morning, come to school at 7 in the morning. I'm just working so I can pay for my food and be alright. It's never good enough. I'm always drifting. (Lane Community College, LC participant)

As this and other quotes from these sessions demonstrates, experiencing food insecurity is intimately related to other basic need challenges, such as being able to afford rent or childcare-- a circumstance that sometimes requires students to make difficult decisions. These hard fought decisions between different basic needs and responsibilities are elaborated on in the next section.

4. Trade-offs

These listening circles clearly demonstrate participants' overwhelming difficulties in meeting basic needs while in college. When struggling with food insecurity, such stressors can begin to affect everyday decisions, and students commonly described difficulties associated with balancing outright hunger, or worry over adequate food supplies, with work, school and family needs. This is an almost inevitable consequence when considering that, for low-income households, basic needs often come out of one 'pot;' while expenses like rent and childcare are non-negotiable, grocery budgets can be flexed. This can result in inadequate supplies of nutritious foods. While previous sections have alluded to this, the following discussion gives this specific problem proper voice by expanding on students' recurring problem of being forced to choose one basic need over another, or basic needs over education.

4.1. Hunger or Housing

Everything is so expensive and sometimes you have to choose between eating or paying rent. (Oregon State University, respondent)

The trade-off between food and housing was a central issue emerging within listening circles and survey responses. Participants described balancing competing bills like rent, utilities and groceries on top of heavy academic and professional workloads. Low wages and high college costs only exacerbated these challenges. When faced with trade-offs, participants described feeling pushed to cover other necessities before food.

I personally cannot afford to buy groceries because I have rent, tuition and other bills to pay. (Portland State University, respondent)

There is a lot of stress that comes with not knowing where their [college students'] next meal may come from, or where they're sleeping that night. Chances are, that is their top priority. (Portland Community College, respondent)

When asked about other basic needs difficulties, a distressing number of listening circle participants and survey respondents indicated immediate and dire circumstances centered around homelessness. By way of tents, cars, and other makeshift shelters, some students described moving constantly, showering in the gyms at school, and eating irregularly.

My situation is dark. I sleep in a tent. I had to download the city ordinance of where we're allowed to put them up. [...] They can literally say 'this is an eyesore, you have 24 hours to move'. (Portland Community College, respondent)

Students struggling with housing insecurity or homelessness also noted how academic requirements superseded basic needs.

There is no ability during a term to shift focus away from classes, so if you lose your housing, you have to keep trying to attend school and classes while homeless. If you don't have money for food, you have to eat something that doesn't adequately nourish or go hungry [instead] and try to keep working on classes... (Portland State University, respondent)

4.2. Work-School Balance

While homelessness and housing insecurity can be detrimental for student outcomes, balancing high academic demands with high professional workloads leads to another set of difficult trade-offs. Many participants voiced having to choose between dedicating time to school and dedicating time to paid employment. When faced with these decisions, many felt compelled to choose work over academics to ensure they had enough funds to get through the month -- enough to 'put food on the table' and 'keep the lights on.'

It's terrifying to not have a safety net. I have to balance hours working or hours studying for classes. If I want to have money for anything more than rent, that takes out of study time and my grades suffer. (Portland Community College, respondent)

Students frequently described reducing the amount of time they focused on school in order to work enough hours to cover monthly obligations. For many participants in both the survey and listening circles, that balance was challenging; for others it was exhausting or even felt impossible.

Whenever I go back to school, I feel like I'm in survival mode with hardly having any free time but still being expected to work [and] earn enough to sustain myself in Portland. (Portland State University, respondent)

4.2.1. SNAP and Part-Time Work

It's difficult because you have to be working 20 hours a week to qualify as a student [for SNAP]. The problem is, many students who need food stamps are taking rigorous classes. [...] Working 20 hours a week and doing homework for four difficult classes is hard! I do work 20 hours a week, at minimum wage, and make less than \$1000/month. Half [of] that goes to rent and a quarter to bills. I cannot live on \$250/month. (Portland State University, respondent)

Some students indicated they struggled to meet SNAP program eligibility requirements while also maintaining academic obligations. The above quote demonstrates both the lack of understanding of reduced eligibility criteria for undergraduate students in Oregon, but also the stress associated with attempting to work more than a few hours a week while enrolled full time in higher education. Participants also discussed needing to justify their reasons for attending school in order to receive SNAP -- in some cases scrambling to articulate a job goal to meet the exemption of participating in an approved educational program. When barriers to SNAP were overcome, benefit amounts weren't always enough. Several students described a difficult application process ending with minimal SNAP allotments.

SNAP gave me \$16/ month. As a homeless student working part-time, SNAP decided \$16/month was enough to feed me. (Columbia Gorge Community College, respondent)

Students utilizing SNAP also indicated a trade-off between work hours and SNAP benefits. When working more than the bare minimum hours to cover monthly expenses, SNAP allotments tended to be reduced. Yet some students needed to work even more hours than before to actually cover the financial gap those reduced SNAP benefits left. Even when the payoffs were low, though, some students continued to apply for SNAP. One participant describes this problem:

The systemic structures that are in place penalize students. If you are being supported financially in one bucket then you try to access SNAP, [the] most the student can get is \$15 a month. [...] But, if I don't apply for SNAP... I need that \$15. (Portland Community College, LC participant)

4.3. Family and Future

Being a single mom with sole custody of two teenagers, attending college full time, and working part time is a tremendous load. I struggle to make ends meet every month. The physical toll of being under this amount of pressure is a lot. I make \$100 [over the limit] to qualify for SNAP. [...] It shouldn't be this much of a struggle to meet our basic human needs. (Portland State University, respondent)

The balance of time and money is a challenge for most students, but this problem extends especially to non-traditional students with dependents. Several parents indicated the trade-offs of attending school and working enough to support a family, describing a need for assistance with transportation costs, childcare, and food. Difficult circumstances led some to highlight choices they often have to make between their families and their futures.

I wish there was more opportunities or grants for single parents going back to school to help with parking permits, or opportunities for our children to have after school programs while we study for our education. [...] I know not every student is a parent but there are more of us trying to make it out of poverty. (Oregon State University, respondent)

I know myself as a parent/student [who] struggles with food insecurity. You are always choosing what's more important, you eating for lunch or dinner. Because you can only pay for one. [...] Even though I have SNAP benefits, we run out of food by the end of the month. So I eat less. (Oregon State University, respondent)

The listening circles and survey responses indicated serious difficulties in maintaining a work-life balance -- earning enough to eat while also studying enough to succeed academically and plan for a hopeful future. Housing and food insecurities were described by a number of participants and were connected repeatedly to declining academic success. When participants were asked, "What would you want [decision-makers] to know about what it's like to be a college student today," one participant elucidates the struggles of trading one basic need for another:

The most difficult thing about college should be the academic coursework, but it isn't. The most difficult thing is trying to survive without incurring soul-crushing debt or breaking yourself by working extra jobs to make ends meet. 'Choosing' between buying books for your class, medicine you need to live, and food to eat

isn't really a choice – it's just picking the least horrible path. (Columbia Gorge Community College, respondent)

5. Disconnection From Decision Makers

Several institutions involved in these listening circles and surveys have responded to national calls for more student support services by creating campus food pantries and outreach events. However, participants overwhelmingly noted the inadequacy of these services and a general lack of understanding about their actual needs, leading to a significant disconnect between decision makers and students. Students often voiced feelings of not being heard or consulted with by institutional administration and legislators; being misperceived by previous generations of college students that lived under very different circumstances; being negatively stereotyped about their lived experiences; and subjected to cumbersome, often confusing and invasive processes to access benefits. Exemplifying such a mismatch, one participant highlighted how students in the dorms on her campus didn't have access to a kitchen, so pantries providing raw foods didn't solve their problems. She explained,

*[...] there's just no real understanding of what the issue is or what solutions are already in place. Students would want to take the food, but they wouldn't have means to cook it or know what to do with it.
(University of Oregon, LC participant)*

This corroborates feelings expressed by many students of not being genuinely engaged or consulted with by those crafting policies and programs. Some went so far as to say they felt disregarded and viewed as merely a source of revenue.

They really do not care. Schools are just businesses, that's what I've come to realize. They take your money and they do not care. If you're paying them you are a thing, but if you're not paying them they're going to be angry. (Lane Community College, LC participant)

What we want from the administrators and the legislators is that they listen and understand us and take action (Western Oregon University, LC participant)

This disconnection between students and decision-makers was made clear in one earnest, but misguided attempt to support students struggling with food insecurity. When asked how a respondent's institution supports students, one staff person said:

*We allow one student in serious need to have all the cans from the recycle bins.
(unidentified campus, respondent)*

Another consistently expressed frustration related to institutional administrations' lackluster approaches to providing welcoming and stigma-free

environments for those struggling to meet basic needs. Multiple participants highlighted isolated locations, confusion over where to go and unfriendly hours of operation, adding to the shame associated with accessing the resources. As one student expressed,

I went there last week and it [food pantry] got moved again. It's very small and you just feel very shameful walking in there. (Western Oregon University, LC participant)

It can be really frustrating when it feels like the administration is not completely backing and seeing the value in it. It's [the food pantry] kind of tossed around and located in a shady location. (Western Oregon University, LC participant)

The growing unaffordability of college life was another deep concern for many -- paying tuition and fees that continue to increase while working jobs with wages that don't. Some were able to connect this with lack of proportionate increases in state funding.

There's been major disinvestment in higher education from states and the federal government and that has had a lot of impacts on campus with tuition skyrocketing at a disproportionate rate compared to wages... (University of Oregon, LC participant)

Students also expressed disappointments around administrators' and lawmakers' seeming ignorance of modern-day college student realities -- how starkly different they are from a few decades ago. Depicting a picture of the modern college student, participants at the University of Oregon reflected that being financially independent, working multiple jobs, and cohabitating in tight spaces is now a norm, rather than an anomaly:

What you think the reality of what student life should be and what it actually is, is quite different. [...] I think gone are the days for most people where you just show up as a freshman and you just have fun for four years [...]. (University of Oregon, LC participant).

Several others reflected that the older generations who went to college while being financially supported by their parents, or who didn't need to work full time (perhaps not at all), likely could not relate to the increased burdens placed on current students. A few others discussed that previous generations may also have benefited from generous financial aid, arguing that the amount now given out is simply insufficient to cover college costs.

Lawmakers – I'm sure they all have been to college... But they may have had

scholarships (Linn-Benton Community College, LC participant)

A full Pell Grant so many years ago was your entire tuition but now it's a small part of it. We have to work multiple jobs to make ends meet (Lane Community College, LC participant)

6. SNAP: Not Exempted From the Disconnect

While there seemed to be a resounding agreement across campuses over the lack of connection between students' real needs and institutional decision makers' perceptions, this concern was expressed specifically for the SNAP program as well. Participants shared they were already overwhelmed by navigating on-campus systems that offered benefits in a fragmented and uncoordinated manner. SNAP, then, was just another confusing, cumbersome and privacy-invading program for some that came with seemingly arbitrary requirements and nonsensical benefit amounts. The following are just a few of the quotes from those discussions:

A student's decision to work less than 20 hours a week to mitigate student loan debt, yet still have time to dedicate to college, is met by being denied Oregon SNAP benefits. (Portland Community College, LC participant)

[...] you have to go through hoop after hoop after hoop. It's pointless to have to do this. (Lane Community College, LC participant)

I was deterred, as a queer/trans student it has those male/female boxes and a legal name. It feels bad. I had a breakdown. I don't want to do this anymore. (Portland Community College, LC participant)

I didn't get very much, \$12 a month. It was a really lengthy process for very little help and [my school] made it more difficult. (Western Oregon University, respondent)

7. Positive impacts of SNAP

While students consistently identified lack of adequate support programs to meet basic needs as a component of their day-to-day struggles, they also indicated how existing programs *do* help. When students were able to access resources that felt more than just superficial or absolutely minimal, they expressed in a straightforward manner the relief it provided.

SNAP is the difference between eating or not. Even if it's just discounted muffins, or a couple potatoes. Ramen- I couldn't eat them for a long time after that. (Linn-Benton Community College, LC)

participant)

[SNAP] a huge life changer, it's beyond words how helpful it has been. ...I buy staple food because I can't get in the pantry... I'm grateful for the things in the past and the access I have now. (Portland Community College, LC participant)

Participants across these institutions also described how SNAP was, or could be, beneficial for other areas of their lives, including physical health, emotional wellbeing and academic performance. SNAP benefits freed up tight resources for some that could then be used for other needs, thereby reducing overall stress and providing more of another precious resource: time. For instance, transcripts reveal that rising tuition and fees are substantial stressors for many of these students, but that they feel forced to pay them. Living expenses are also disproportionately high, yet non-negotiable; and the emotional and physical hardships of managing a schedule with multiple jobs and multiple classes -- let alone other family responsibilities -- takes its toll. Significant SNAP benefits, however, relieve a portion of this stress while enabling students to spend more time on academic, family and health-promoting activities.

I feel like it could give a little more security and padding in the monthly budget. If something comes up and happens, which it does all the time, then you know that you can still eat and be fine. The food budget is the most flexible, in that you have a set rent and a phone and a car and whatever. But food is the only place you can really take something out of your budget. If you have SNAP, you know that you will always have food. That gives more flexibility for other issues... (University of Oregon, LC participant)

[I] could spend more time studying instead of working [if I had SNAP]. Right now, I'm basically covering for anyone, so I might be closing at midnight one morning and then opening 7am the next morning. That means that I can't study. (University of Oregon, LC participant)

8. Recommendations

These important insights, emerging from Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon's listening circles and survey responses, suggest there is substantial agreement across these eleven campuses on the primary troubles students face in meeting their basic needs, as well as common obstacles that prohibit them from meeting those needs. This includes barriers to applying for, and receiving, SNAP. As students call out for more empathy to rising financial hardships, they also suggest grounded solutions to navigate these problems. The following outlines both suggestions students have explicitly made, as well as suggestions based on the common themes identified above.

8.1 Recommendations for Institutions

- (1) Expanded service provision on campuses. Many participants discussed inadequate support programs on their campuses to meet basic needs, including food. There simply weren't enough available and accessible resources to ensure they would have adequate, nutritious diets while covering other living and educational expenses. More funding and programming is necessary to meet this need.
- (2) Better visibility of, and coordination among, service providers on campuses. Students expressed highly variable experiences with program assistance, outreach and navigation on their campuses. For some participants, how much help they received depended on who they asked or happened to encounter that day. Increased outreach and coordination among on-campus and SNAP service providers would likely ameliorate this issue. Such coordination would also assist with creating a common, inclusive language on campuses regarding basic needs, thereby helping to reduce stigma. Many campuses utilize a 'one-stop-shop' approach with great success (Broton and Cady, 2020).

All students should know about SNAP. The college should advertise the application and provide support in applying. (Portland State University, respondent)

- (3) Collaborative efforts among decision makers and students to craft workable solutions 'on the ground.' Students expressed feelings of being misperceived and marginalized -- that their situations were not understood correctly or genuinely cared about by policy makers and administrators at the institutional, state and federal levels. Establishing regular, campus-specific listening circles and student-led task forces, then, would create more effective policies and programming while also offering safe spaces for students to voice their concerns.

8.2. Recommendations for SNAP

- (1) Reduce SNAP eligibility barriers. Students identified specific eligibility barriers prohibiting them from accessing SNAP benefits. These were unrelated to their actual need for food assistance and included being miscategorized as dependents in families that did not financially support them; graduate class standing, international student status and being over 50 years of age. Lifting these restrictions would enable better access for food insecure college students.
- (2) Increase SNAP outreach and application assistance. Participants voiced confusion

over SNAP application processes, eligibility requirements and risks for deportation, leading to reduced application submissions and higher churn than necessary. Establishing regular SNAP application assistance hours and locations would provide a means for students to access accurate information.

(3) Collaborate with campuses on peer-based intervention and assistance programs

Many students articulated the predominance of negative stigmas around accessing food resources, but also expressed how peer interventions helped them overcome their own, or other students', reservations. Transcripts also revealed ample dialogue among the participants themselves encouraging each other to access programs and clarifying confusion over eligibility requirements. Best practices on many campuses with recognized successful basic needs programs rely on collaborations with their local Departments of Health and Human Services, utilizing peer-based intervention approaches with SNAP application processes (Broton and Cady, 2020).

9. Student Voiced Solutions

While the section entitled 'Recommendations' offered suggestions for actions higher education institutions and the SNAP program could take based on students' expressed needs, current research and best practices, this section outlines specific solutions students participating in this PHFO project proposed. It is important to note that these are not necessarily recommendations from PHFO or staff at Oregon State University. Rather, some of these suggestions provide actionable solutions, while others simply provide a better understanding of students' thought processes and perceptions around basic needs struggles.

9.1. Suggestions to Increase Accessibility and Affordability of Nutritious Foods

Students frequently expressed how lack of affordable, nutritious food on campus negatively impacted their physical health, mental health and academic performance. Numerous suggestions were offered on how to improve this situation. Below is a brief recounting of these suggestions.

- Sliding scale meal plans – meal plans were cited several times as unaffordable, particularly in comparison to food available at grocers
- Reduce meal plan costs for all students
- Sliding scale meals at all dining halls or food facilities on campus (separate from meal plans)
- Provide free meals for low-income students living in dorms (included in their housing fees)
- Provide one free meal for every student, every day
- Allow students to take a limited amount of food home from dining facilities (mentioned in relation to restrictions on meal plans)

- Reduced cost, nutritious meals and snacks available at all dining halls or food facilities (set prices, not sliding scale)
- Do not require students living in the dorms to purchase meal plans
- Free, nutritious snacks available at accessible locations in every building
- Create free 'take-what-you-need' food tables so students don't have to come back (to this or food pantries) multiple times during the week to access food
- Free on-campus meals (hot and cold) for low-income students, perhaps through the expansion of, or duplication of, the National School Lunch Program for K-12 students
- Free campus meals for all students, included as part of tuition and fees (may require legislation)
- Free meal cards for low-income students (to be used like debit at locations)
- Free gift cards for students to use on campus for the purposes of purchasing food
- Create a student-led food/basic needs program in which anyone can donate funds to a 'pot' of money, which can then be instantly accessible to students in need through an app such as Venmo
- Create a program in which students can trade in recyclables for food and textbook credits on campus
- Make more emergency funds available and authorize these for food use on campus
- Create partnerships with local farmers and bakers to bring affordable, nutritious and local foods to campus. This may include donations.
- Do regular food drives on campus for students
- Make it a 'norm' for free food to be served at all student-centered campus events
- Keep dining facilities open during breaks (holidays, summer, between terms)
- Accept SNAP benefits at points of purchase on campus
- Create community gardens on campus full of nutritious food, accessible to students. There were several variations on this suggestion, including
 - The institution (college or university) purchasing additional land for this purpose
 - Turning all green spaces on campus into edible gardening spaces
 - Creating rooftop, edible gardens (this was mentioned in particular reference to parking garages) on campuses
 - Creating vertical gardens on sides of campus buildings
 - Converting all city/town green space into edible gardening space

- Repackage or cook leftovers from dining facilities to produce low-cost meals for students. This reduces food waste and food insecurity simultaneously. Fund the building of campus kitchens if necessary
- Provide farmers' market vouchers
- Do not require student groups and clubs to cater their foods through the expensive university dining systems – allow food to be homemade and brought in and/or purchased from less expensive places
- Reduce catering prices on campus for student groups and clubs and/or offer more affordable options for their events
- Provide a blank check to Associated Students to distribute to student groups. This would then be used to provide food to students at events
- Allow students to volunteer on campus or work confidentially on campus for food credits
 - Honor the work students already do for free on campus (such as organizing clubs, events, etc.) by providing meal credits or other compensation
- Create more places for students to cook their own food on campus
- Provide food credits to students to use on campus according to their credit loads
- Ensure a food pantry is on each campus
- Ensure (expand if necessary) food pantry hours to increase access
- Establish a permanent location and hours for campus pantries at accessible, central locations
- Allow students to visit the pantry multiple times a week, and not just once
- Increase funding to food pantries so they can provide better/more expanded/renovated and inviting facilities, more food options generally and more nutritious, fresh foods. This includes foods for those on restricted diets and those struggling with eating disorders

9.2. Suggestions to Increase Housing Security

Students named housing costs as a primary stressor, and more than one participant identified as houseless or formerly houseless while attending college. The following represents a brief recounting of student-voiced suggestions around housing.

- Better coordination among campuses with local community housing programs and homeless shelters to ensure all students have a place to sleep at night

- Provide more emergency funding for housing, and accessible in large or small amounts throughout the term (rather than at certain times of the term, usually the beginning)
- Free housing/institution pays for housing for all students as part of tuition and fees (may require legislation)
- Enact state-wide rent controls and reduce housing costs (requires legislation)
- Increase income limits on low-income housing programs (requires legislation)
- Increase income thresholds for federal poverty level (FPL) to make basic needs programs more accessible (requires legislation)
- Create subsidized housing specifically for students
- Create a free or reduced cost hostel or hotel on campus (small studios with kitchen and bathroom facilities) for all students who need the housing, including on a night-by-night basis
- The institution (college or university) purchase nearby apartment complexes and renting them out at reduced cost, or free, for students
- Require property owners local to a college or university to offer a certain percentage of their units to low-income students at reduced cost
- Provide rentable hammocks to sleep in on campus
- Create transition homes on campus, or in association with the campus, for former foster youth (FFY) at reduced cost; provide other supports specific to FFY as part of the housing
- Provide a standard basic living expenses allowance for every student
- Provide more low-cost student housing options in general (on and off campus)
- Do not require first year students to live on campus
- Do not require students to move out of their campus residences during the summer or on breaks
- Make housing on campus consistent from year-to-year so students do not need to move annually
- Provide sliding scale housing for students
- Provide an emergency voucher program for rent

9.3 Suggestions to Improve Outreach and Coordination Around Basic Needs Services

Participants also consistently expressed the need for more information, more clarity on programs and eligibility guidelines, and an increased presence of outreach staff. The following presents a brief overview of suggestions around outreach.

- Train faculty, not just student services staff or administration, on college student basic needs' insecurities. Educate them on available resources so they may better direct students
- Provide 'teach and eat' cooking events to not only provide a free meal, but to educate students on healthy cooking and available services
- Renovate pantries to make them more inviting and to reduce stigma
- Provide nutritious recipes at pantries to encourage use of resources and healthy cooking
- Provide more peer intervention to help reduce stigma around programs
- Make outreach on basic needs services more general so low-income students feel less targeted and stigmatized (i.e., send out announcements to all students, encourage all students to come to events addressing basic needs insecurities, etc.)
- Use community center and multicultural center events as an opportunity to also provide outreach on basic needs services
- Provide specific outreach to international students to address their unique challenges
- Provide trainings for students on how to navigate basic needs programs and properly budget household expenses
- Employ a full-time SNAP coordinator on campus to provide outreach and application assistance
- Provide consistent SNAP application assistance hours at an accessible location
 - Hire a student to do this
 - Collaborate with a local DHS office to ensure a trained DHS staff member does this
- Encourage student groups to do more SNAP outreach
- Make information on SNAP for students obviously accessible on the higher education institutions' websites
- Make clear the extended benefits of receiving SNAP (even if benefit amounts are low, being eligible may qualify students for other discounts)
- Provide SNAP outreach at registration events, or in association with online registration
- Require all syllabi to have a basic needs statement and list of resources
- Require every professor or instructor to convey information on basic needs resources to every class every term (beyond the syllabus)
- Circulate mass emails to the student body on how to apply for SNAP
- Advertise basic needs services on campus more (posters, flyers, postcards, etc.)
- Provide specific information session on basic needs supports

- Provide specific space at new student orientations to address basic needs insecurities and how to access supports
- Better define the definition of food insecurity for students during outreach efforts and events (many students do not realize they are food insecure)
- Select a food ambassador for every academic department or School; these ambassadors can then come together to discuss food insecurity issues across the campus, and then report this information to the President of the university or college
- Provide stipends for students who do basic needs outreach work
- Create 'street teams' for outreach on basic needs supports – handing out flyers and information, and talking with students much as band members do when they promote a show
- Create a 'one stop' student center to assist with all basic needs, as well as educational expenses. House a SNAP ambassador there
- Create a student forum for current student, alumni and staff to come together to assess and address student basic needs struggles
- Include information on community resources, not just campus resources, in outreach and in appropriate information centers

9.4 Suggestions to Reduce Educational Costs

Educational costs were also frequently identified as significant barriers to completing a degree in higher education among listening circle and survey. The following briefly outlines suggestions to help eliminate or reduce these costs.

- Provide more scholarships to increase access to higher education generally and to reduce need for loans (institutions and federal/state financial aid programs)
- Eliminate work restrictions on scholarship programs
- Eliminate the practice of reducing funding amounts on scholarships for those who receive certain scholarships and then take paid employment
- If work restrictions are not removed from scholarship programs, force the program to pay the difference between their funding and basic needs expenses
- Make scholarships less time consuming to apply for
- Provide free textbooks, perhaps as part of tuition and fees
- Make tuition free (may require legislation)
- Decrease tuition
- Enact tuition freezes to make tuition more predictable from year to year (may require legislation)

- Ensure no required materials are only available through the college or university (such as at the expensive campus bookstore)
- Decrease top earning salaries of employees at colleges and universities. Then recirculate this funding to address student basic needs
- Provide free or reduced cost internet access
- Provide free computers to any student who needs one
- Ensure free tutors are accessible
- Individuate student fees so they are only paying for the services and facilities they use
- Provide specific scholarships or funding for DACA students, including for the cost of visas (consider these costs educational and assist in covering them)
- Establish a program that anyone can donate to and that students can access on an as-needed basis for educational costs
- Expand Open Educational Resources and use them (OERs)
- Require all recipients of financial aid to take a workshop on available resources and how to use them

Suggestions Specific for Federal and State Financial Aid

- Increase income limits so that more students qualify for financial aid, such as Pell Grants
- Increase grant and scholarship allotments to more closely align with actual educational costs
- Reduce GPA requirements to receive financial aid/take individual situations into more consideration (there are many reasons a student's GPA may fall, including basic needs struggles)
- Provide more grants; reduce the need for loans
- Student loan forgiveness (unclear)
- Make it easier to qualify as an independent student so that parents' income need not be counted, particularly for situations in which the students' family is unable to contribute to educational expenses

9.5 Suggestions For Transportation Issues

Transportation was not discussed as a barrier as often as food, housing and educational costs. However, transportation still posed a formidable issue for several participants. Below is a concise outline of suggestions around transportation access and affordability.

- Provide free parking to all students

- Provide a transportation credit based on credit load (unclear)
- Provide students in need with gas cards to get to and from campus\
- Provide more community-based transportation options to help students get from their homes to the campus
- Provide bus passes to online students, as well as to on-campus students
- Provide campus sponsored transportation to access basic needs supplies, such as trips to the grocer

9.6 Suggestions for Supporting Student Parents

While only a minority of students that participated in the listening circles and survey identified as student parents, they offered specific suggestions to meet the unique needs of this group. These are presented, briefly, below.

- Provide free or affordable, on-campus childcare
- Provide free or affordable on-campus preschool (suggestion separate from others)
- Provide grants to pay for childcare
- Fund a 1.0 FTE position to specifically focus on the needs of students with dependents
- Create and recognize a sanctioned group on campus to assess and address the needs of students with children or other dependents. Create a channel to return this information to administration
- Provide classroom accommodations for parents, including more leniency on late assignments, attendance and the need to bring children to class

9.7 Specific Suggestions for SNAP

Participants offered many suggestions, as indicated above, on helping students meet their basic needs, including for food. However, several also had specific suggestions to improve the SNAP program, as outlined below.

- Increase benefit amounts to more accurately reflect modern costs of food
- Reduce eligibility barriers for students so that more who need it can qualify
- Modify the calculations that create disincentives to seek paid employment (reducing benefits after paid employment is acquired/ increased to the point it makes employment or increased counterproductive)
- Reduce the administrative burden required to acquire or maintain SNAP benefits (decrease the amount of paperwork required)

- Provide increased allotments as an incentive for attendance over multiple terms or for certain GPAs
- Make SNAP universally available to all full-time students
- Require struggling students to apply for SNAP
- Make enrolling in SNAP an easy option when enrolling for courses
- Update the SNAP website to eliminate technical difficulties that make the application process more difficult
- Centralize government information systems so that if a student is receiving another benefit (such as SSI) their information is easy to access and transfer into a SNAP application
- Instead of annual reports that require extensive paperwork, provide an option that simply states there is no change (to reduce administrative burden)
- Make SNAP assistance via DHS available during non-business hours
- Modify the calculations so that if an applicant does not have housing costs (such as due to homelessness), their benefits are not reduced
- Provide consistent case management by the same person upon client request
- Provide greater flexibility in defining a food household, particularly for students who live with parents but do not share food
- Increase turnaround times to receive benefits
- Make it easier for graduate students to qualify: include them in the latest round of exemption modifications
- Eliminate age restrictions to qualify for SNAP under student status
- Provide more protections for applicants with undocumented family members; find ways to assure them their families will not be punished or deported if they receive benefits

9.8 Demands for Legislators

Students expressed specific, and passionate, demands for their legislators. Several students held the state and federal governments directly responsible for at least a portion of their struggles to pay for their educations while meeting their basic needs. These are recapped briefly below. Some are reflected in previous sections, but also warrant itemization here due to students' references to legislative actions that may be required.

- Take action to loosen eligibility requirements around students and SNAP
- Take action to increase SNAP allotments to reflect the real cost of food
- Take action to eliminate disincentives to seek paid employment (reducing benefits after paid employment is acquired/ increased to the point it makes employment or increased counterproductive)

- Pass bills to reduce housing costs generally and to institute rent controls
- Raise the income threshold for the federal poverty line (FPL) so more of those struggling with basic needs qualify
- Pass a bill to expand the National Free Lunch program to college students or create a comparable program
- Pass a bill, or provide funding, to make childcare more affordable in general
- Pass a bill, or provide funding, for colleges and universities to provide more basic needs support as part of their tuition and fees. This may include free food programs, free housing and free textbooks
- Invest in higher education, recognizing that students are not only bettering themselves, but bettering the economy and society by seeking higher education
- Pass a bill requiring campuses to reduce food for costs at their facilities for students
- Eliminate tax breaks for the wealthy and redirect those funds to higher education
- Make tuition free at all colleges and universities
- Reduce tuition at all colleges and universities
- Freeze tuition at all colleges and universities to make educational costs more predictable from year to year
- Criminalize poverty (unclear – reasonable to suggest this referred to ensuring no one needs to live in poverty, not that those who are in poverty should be criminals)
- Declare housing as a basic human right
- Establish universal health care (or at least for all students)
- Fix the Four Year Free program so that it actually makes higher education free before loans
- Provide structured incentives for attending college (unclear)
- Enact legislation or other means to reduce textbook costs
- Standardize minimum wage across states (assumed: to make meeting basic needs easier and more predictable)
- Increase minimum wage
- Don't increase minimum wage (expressed around fear this will only increase costs of basic needs)
- Lower student debt (unclear)
- Guarantee job placement after earning a degree
- Create mechanisms for greater higher educational funding accountability; ensure a portion of this goes to meeting students' basic needs
- Reduce or elimination the privatization of higher education

- Legislate the creation of community gardens/provide funding for local sustainable food systems that can also serve students
- Take the time to meet, and be open to, understanding more of the realities of a modern, low-income, college student's life. Repeatedly, students expressed feeling misunderstood, ignored, marginalized and misrepresented by those in Congress and the federal government. This leads to inaction or misguided action resulting in deep struggles to meet basic needs while paying for their education.

9.9 Demands and suggestions for Administrators of Higher Education Institutions

Students held legislators accountable for at least a portion of their troubles in affording 'the college life,' but they also held administration at their institutions accountable. In some cases, the following were demands for their administrators; in others, they were more softly articulated as suggestions.

- More sensitivity and awareness training around low-income students' struggle to meet basic needs and to the skyrocketing cost of modern higher education in general
- Circulate more surveys and other means to allow students to convey their struggles
- Be accountable for the data collected from students – tell students what the data will be used for and then be accountable for creating resources to address the needs expressed
- Ensure resources are better coordinated on campus and that staff, faculty and administrators alike know about these resources, and can direct students to them
- Provide a yearly, reliable report on student basic needs' assessments and deficits (on individual campuses)
- Organize task forces comprised of students, staff and administration to address basic needs shortages among students
- Democratize Boards of Trustees
- Increase pay for students at campus jobs
- Increase student employment opportunities on campus
- Provide more student stipends for activities such as serving on task forces
- Address unpaid internships (unclear; expressed around need to take unpaid internships for career development opportunities, but how difficult this was to also meet basic needs and participate in extracurriculars that would also be beneficial)
- Standardize more flexible classroom accommodations for students struggling with basic needs (such as for attendance and assignment extensions)

9.10 Other Suggestions

Some student suggestions simply did not fit well within other categories, or were hard to identify as suggestions for institutional administration, legislators or both. However, they are important to include. Briefly, these are as follows:

- Provide lockers on campus for those who need to store shower, hygiene and food supplies
- Provide laundry and shower facilities on campus
- Provide access to free phones
- Provide rewards for attending classes or earning certain GPAs – small luxuries a student would be unlikely to afford otherwise
- Accept Medicaid at the campus clinic
- Provide dental services on campus
- Provide pharmacies on campus

10. Conclusion

This report explores the lived experiences of Oregon college students as they strive to meet basic needs while attending college -- analyzing not only their experiences with these struggles, but also how they cope. Student voices reveal that lack of resources, including food, remain far too prevalent among those seeking higher education in Oregon. Debilitating stress often accompanies these challenges, presenting nearly impossible trade-offs at times among school, employment and family responsibilities. Students further link these basic needs insecurities to adverse impacts on their physical health, emotional wellbeing and academic performance.

In addition to documenting these students' stresses and sacrifices, this study also focuses on understanding what they envision as potential solutions. Transcripts and survey responses indicate students want to be recognized -- to be heard, to be understood for the modern, expensive and time consuming circumstances they navigate. They want to be welcomed into problem-solving spaces that will respect their insights. They want and need *resources* for basic needs -- just the basics: food, housing, childcare and educational supplies. And they don't just want these things just for themselves -- they call out for them in the hopes of completing their educational goals, which will enable them to feed their families and be self-sufficient, productive members of society. At its core, these students are articulating the very heart of the 'American Dream.' By offering greater empathy and more support services, including on-campus basic needs programs and increased SNAP access, decision makers will be helping them achieve that dream.

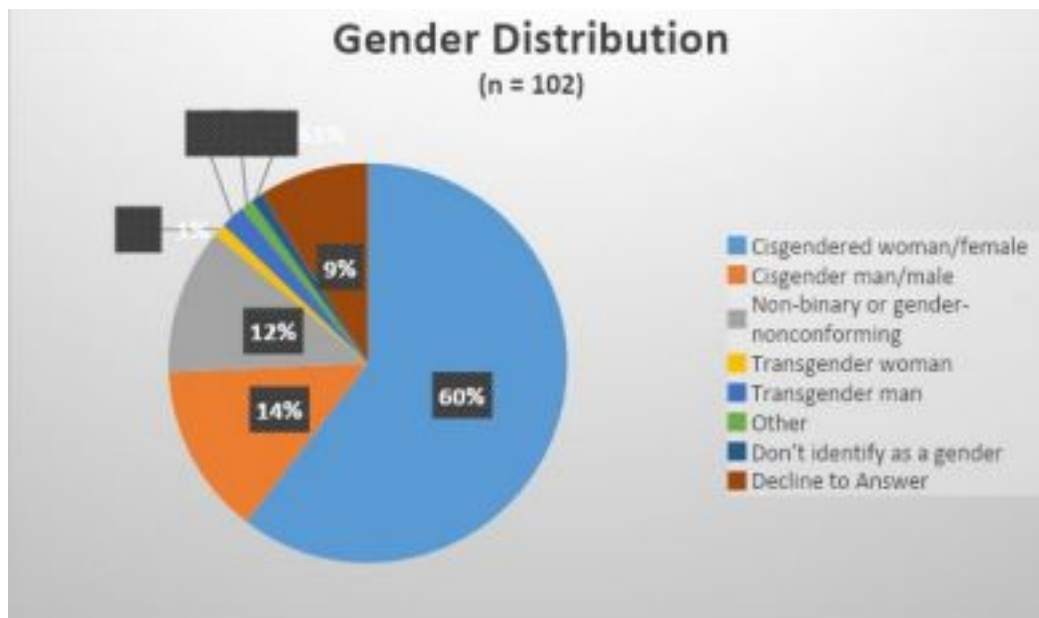
Listening Circle and Survey Participant Characteristics

Listening Circle Questionnaire Analysis

Eleven community colleges and four-year universities in Oregon collaborated with Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon (PHFO) to distribute a confidential survey on student basic needs. This was to gain a wider breadth of responses at institutions PHFO was unable to visit and relied on a question set similar to that used in on-campus listening circles. This section reveals the diversity of experiences and demographics captured by the 128 responses from students and administrators. The majority were gathered from five institutions: Portland State University (20), Portland Community College (33), Oregon State University (20), Columbia Gorge Community College (12) and Linn-Benton Community College (7). The rest arrived from Central Oregon Community College, Mt. Hood Community College, Clackamas Community College, and Western Oregon University.

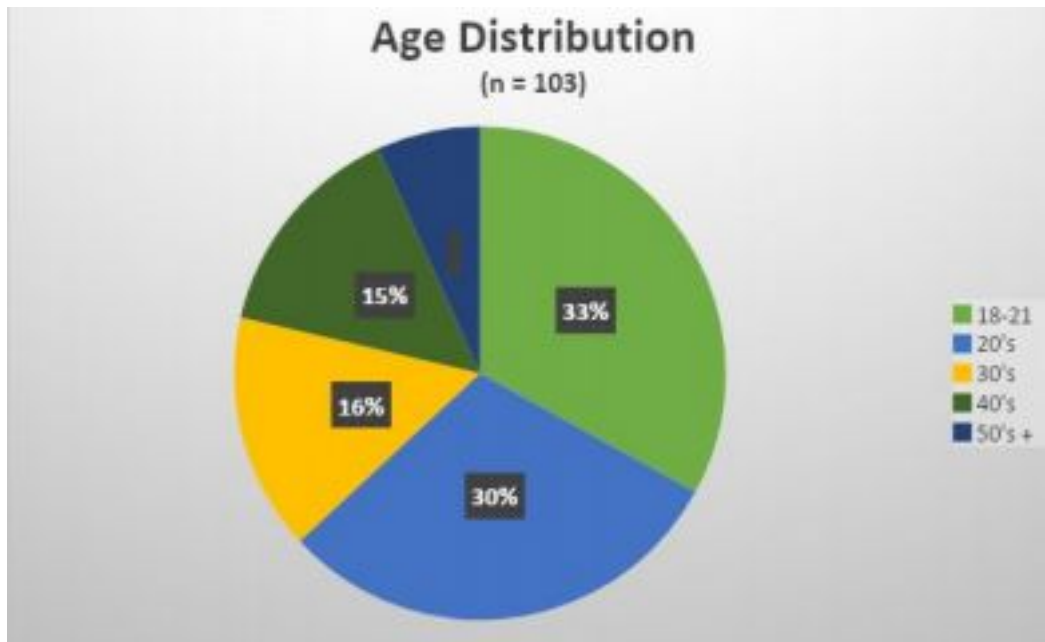
1. Gender, Age and Race/Ethnicity

When asked to self-identify gender, 102 students responded (n = 102). Sixty-one (61) self-identified as Cisgendered Women or Females; 14 identified as Cisgendered Men or Males; 2 identified as Transgendered womxn or Transfeminine; 1 identified as a transgendered man or transmasculine; 12 identified as gender nonbinary or nonconforming; 3 identified as another category; and 9 respondents declined to respond.

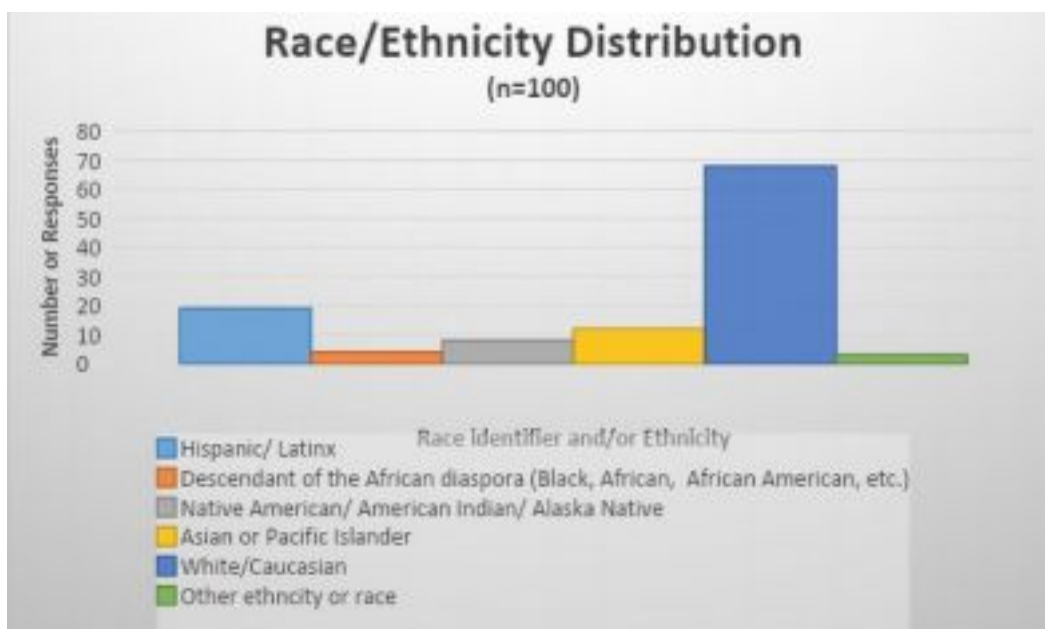


Respondents were also asked to provide their ages, for which 103 responses were gathered (n = 103). Of these, 34 respondents were aged 18-21; 31 respondents were

22-29; 16 respondents were 30-39; 15 respondents were 40-49; and 7 were 50 years or older.

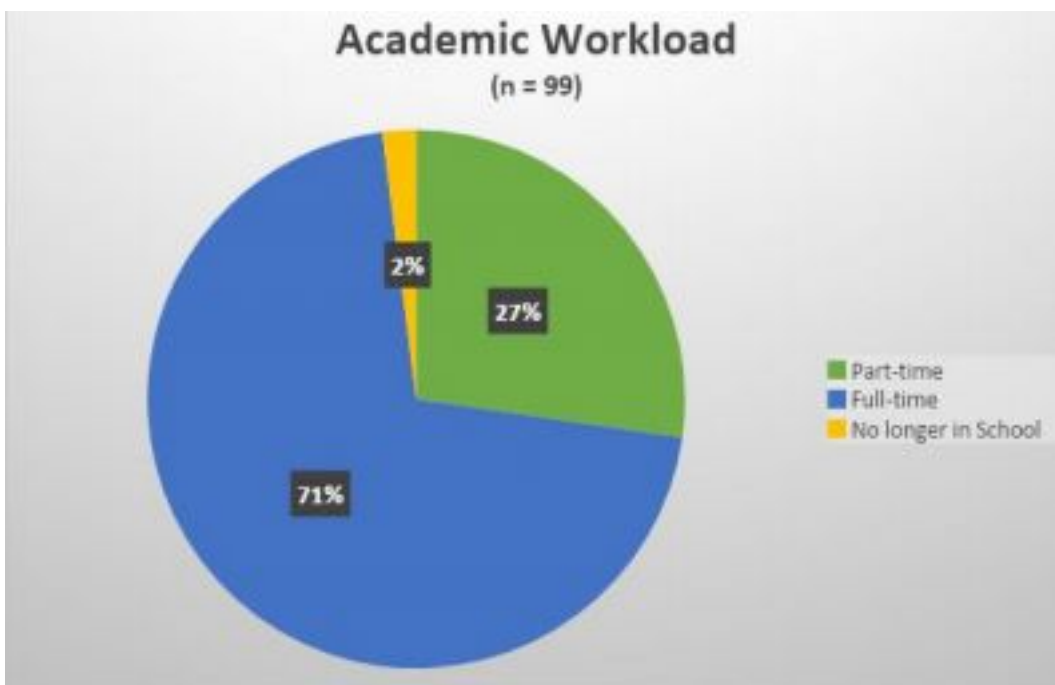
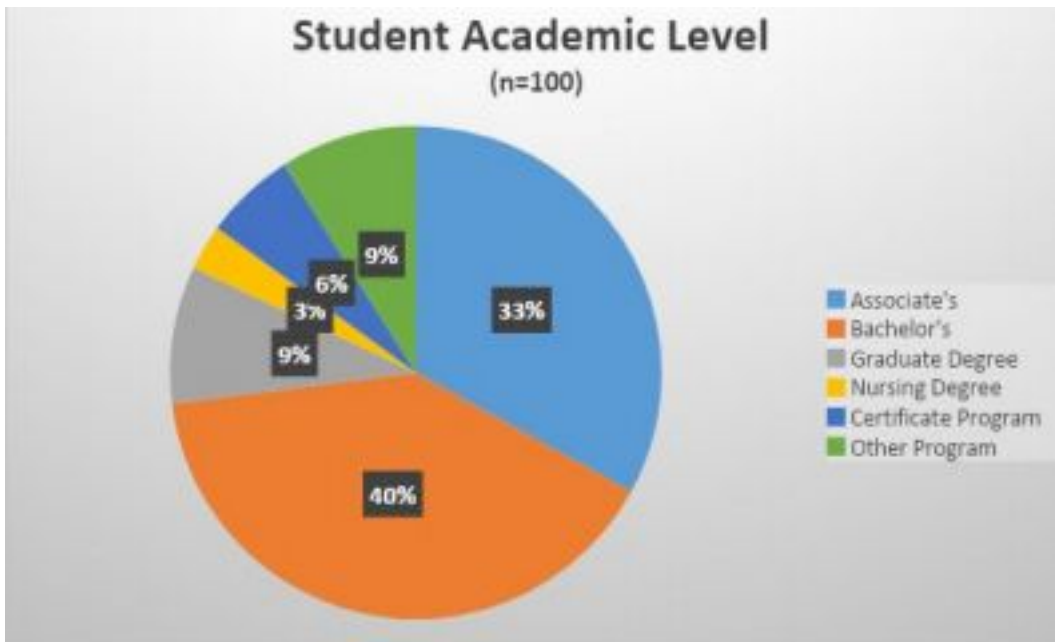


In addition to gender and age, respondents were asked to characterize their race and/or ethnicity. Of 100 responses (including multiple selections), 68 identified as White/Caucasian; 19 identified as Hispanic/Latinx; 12 Identified as Asian or Pacific Islander; 8 identified as Native American/American Indian/Alaska Native; 4 identified as Descendant of the African diaspora (Black, African, African-American, etc.); and 3 identified as other racial/ethnic backgrounds.



2. Academic Goals and Workloads

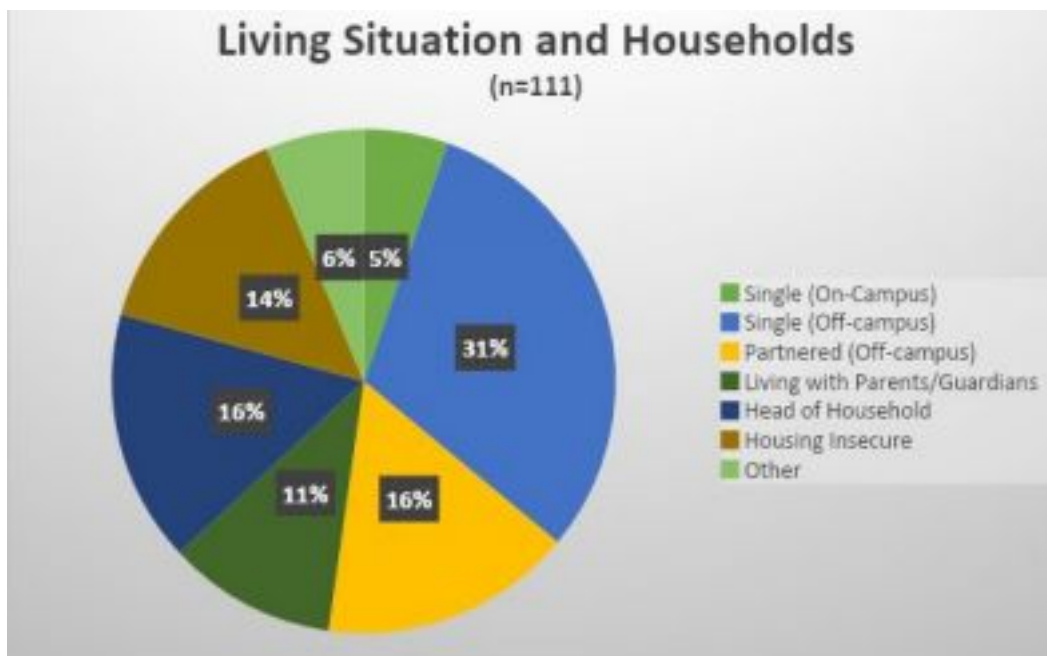
Students were also asked to identify their respective academic programs and credit loads (part or full time). Of 100 responses (n=100) to the former question, 33 students were working on an Associate's degree; 40 were in the process of earning a Bachelor's; 9 were in a graduate program; 3 identified as nursing students; 6 were earning certificates; and 9 students identified with 'other program' goals. Ninety-nine responded to the question on credit load (n=99). Twenty-seven (27) students identified as part time; 70 students identified as full time, and 2 respondents indicated they were no longer enrolled.



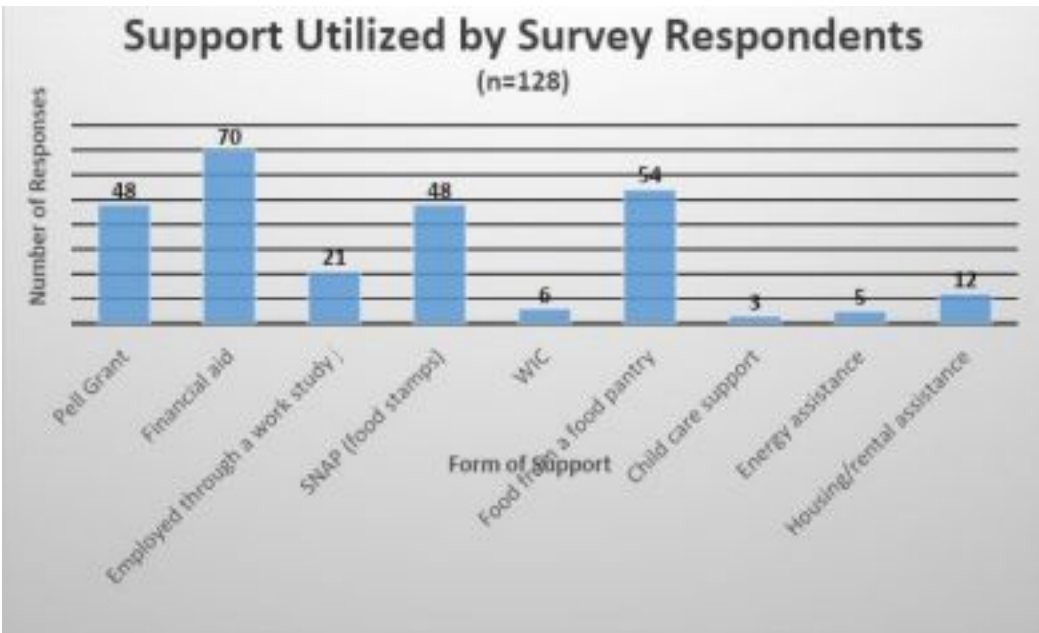
3. Living Situations and Resources

To better identify student needs, several survey questions focused on participants' living situations, financial aid resources and non-financial supports.

Participants were first asked to describe their living situations and define their households. Of 111 responses, 6 indicated they were single and lived on-campus; 34 respondents were single and lived off-campus; 18 were partnered living off-campus; 12 respondents lived with parents or guardians; 18 were the heads of their households with children or other dependents; 16 were housing insecure or homeless; and 7 identified as living in 'other' situations.

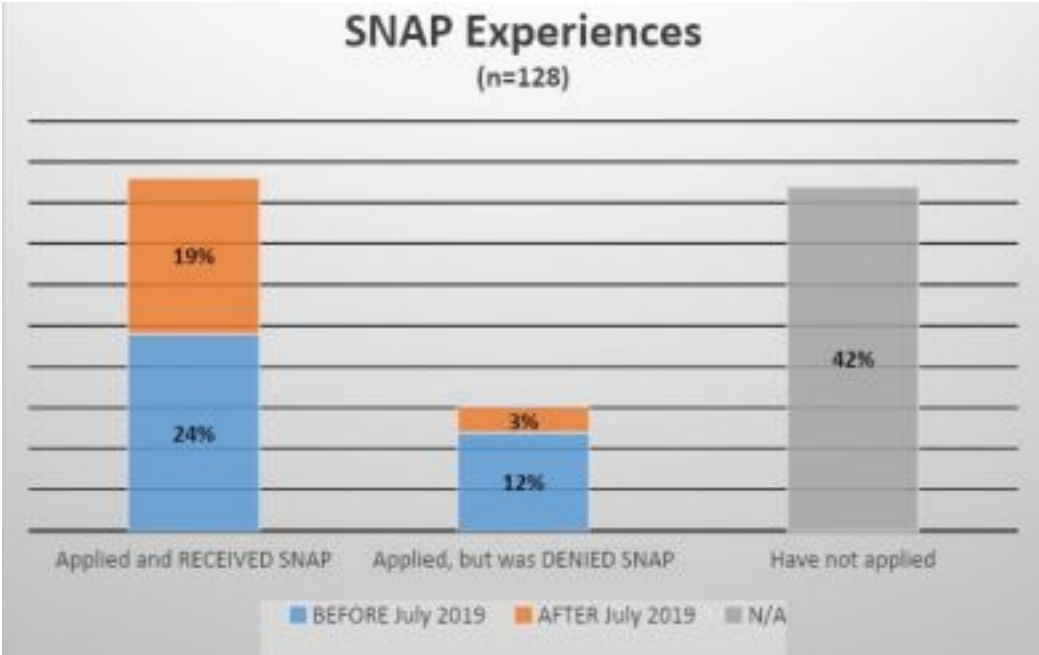


Survey participants were also asked to include information regarding financial and non-financial used to support themselves while in college. Of 93 responses (including multiple selection of aids), 48 respondents had received a Pell Grant; 70 respondents had received financial aid through their institutions; 21 were employed via Work Study; 48 received SNAP; 6 received WIC; 3 received child care assistance; 5 received energy assistance; and 12 received housing/rental assistance. Additionally, 54 respondents indicated they had used school and community food pantries.

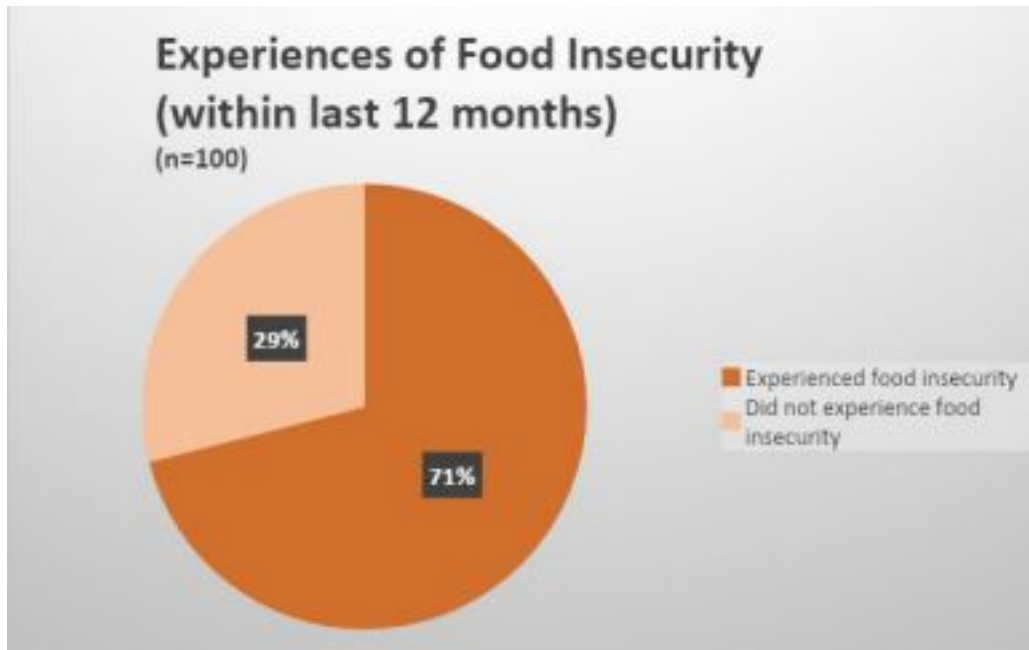


4. SNAP Experiences and Food Insecurity

This PFHO survey also requested information about participants' experiences with SNAP benefits before and after the regulatory changes to Oregon's SNAP program in July of 2019. Of 128 responses, 55 indicated they had applied for and received SNAP, 54 had not applied for SNAP and 19 had applied for but were denied SNAP. Of those who received SNAP benefits (n=55), 56% received benefits *before* July 2019 and 44% received benefits *after* July 2019. Of those who were denied SNAP benefits (n=19), 79% applied *before* July 2019, and 21% had applied *after* July 2019.



Finally, the survey asked students about their experiences with food security in the last 12 months. Defined as “the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe food, or the ability to acquire such food in a socially acceptable manner,” food insecurity was a highly identified issue. Of 100 responses, 71 participants identified as food insecure in the last 12 months, while only 29 had not experienced food insecurity in the previous 12 months.

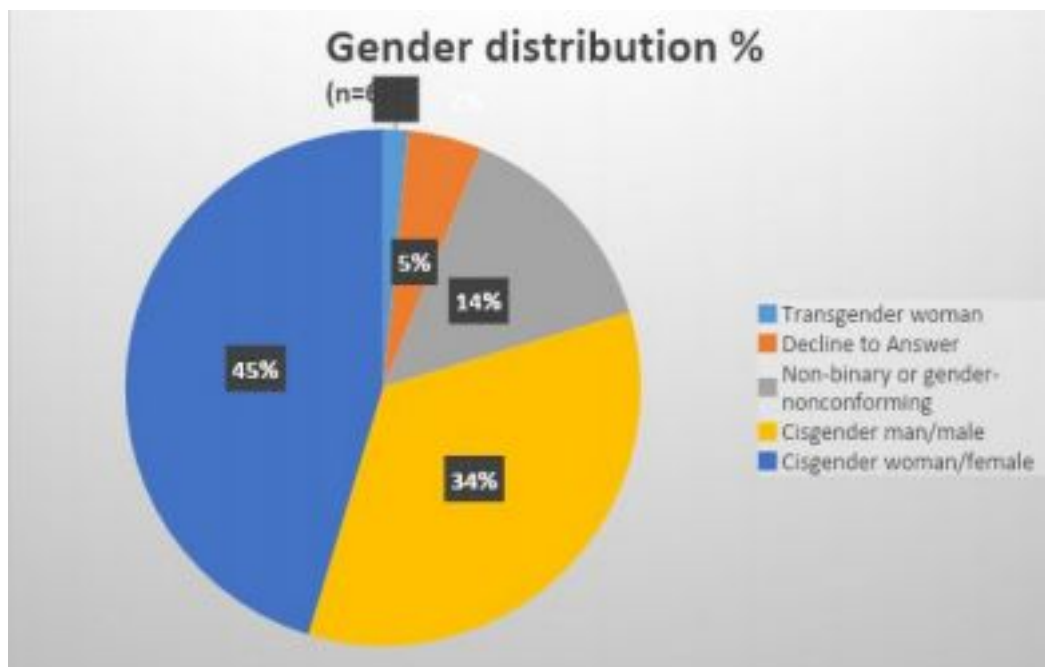


Listening Circle Questionnaire Analysis

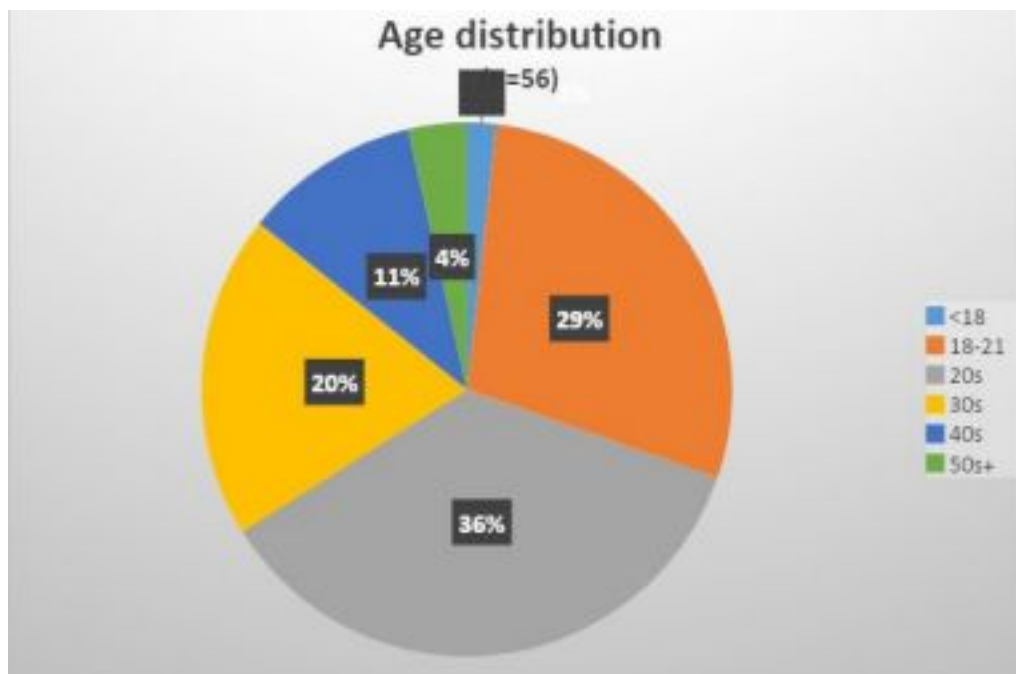
Listening circles hosted by PHFO gathered input from 69 students and administrative staff across seven community colleges and four-year universities. Respondents were asked a variety of demographic questions to ensure the sessions captured the diversity of experiences across Oregon institutions.

1. Gender, Age and Race/Ethnicity

When asked to self-identify gender, 64 students responded (n =64). Twenty-nine (29 self-identified as Cisgendered Women or Females; 22 respondents identified as Cisgendered Men or Males; 1 identified as Transgendered womxn or Transfeminine; 9 identified as gender nonbinary or nonconforming; and 3 respondents declined to respond.

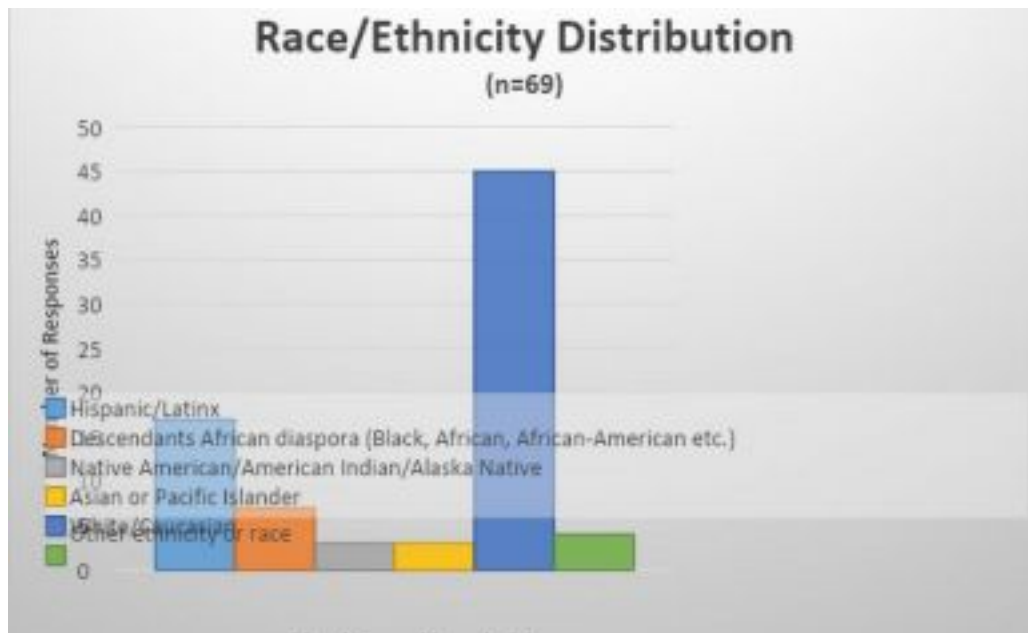


Respondents were also asked to provide their ages, for which 56 responses were gathered (n =56). Of these, 1 respondent was under 18, 16 respondents were aged 18-21; 20 respondents were 22-29; 11 respondents were 30-39; 6 respondents were 40-49; and 2 respondents were 50 years or older.



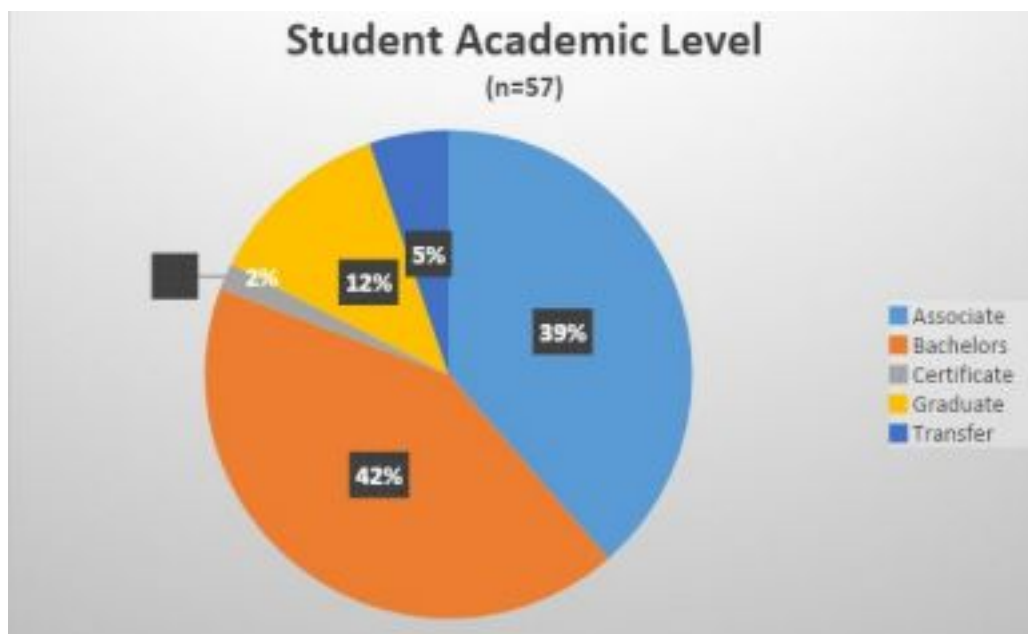
In addition to gender and age, respondents were asked to characterize their race and/or ethnicity. Of 69 responses (including multiple selections) 45 identified as White/Caucasian; 17 identified as Hispanic/Latinx; 7 identified as Descendant of the

African diaspora (Black, African, African-American, etc.); 4 identified as other racial/ethnic backgrounds; 3 Identified as Native American/American Indian/Alaska Native; and 3 Identified as Asian or Pacific Islander.

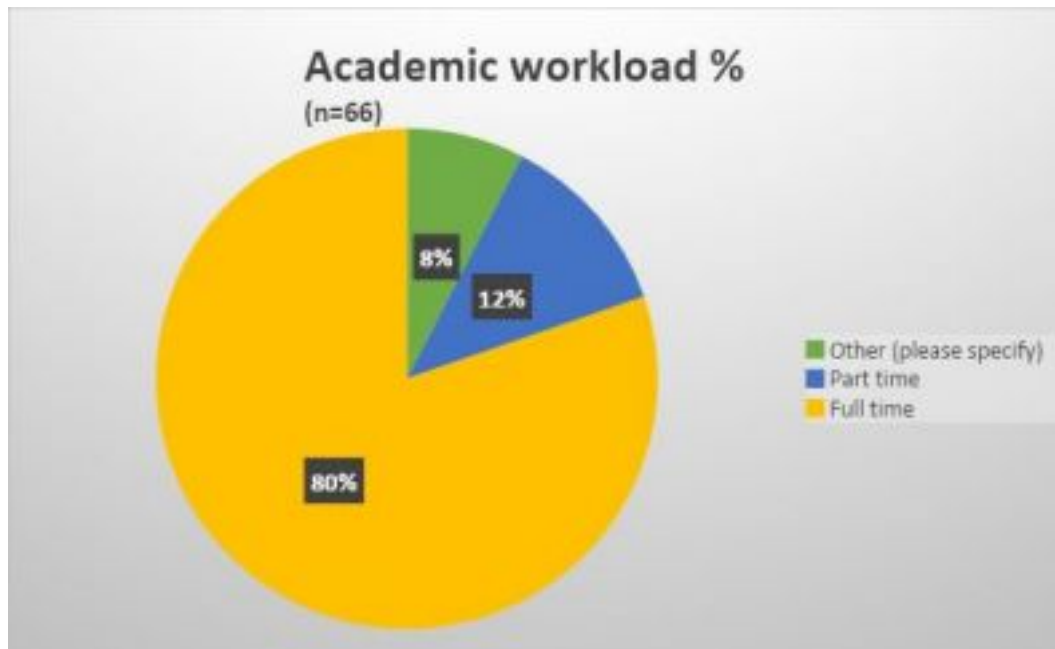


2. Academic Goals and Workloads

Parallel to the survey, questions regarding academic programming were also posed to listening circle participants. Of 57 responses, 22 students were working on an Associate’s degree; 24 were in the process of earning a Bachelor’s degree; 7 were in a graduate program; 3 were transfer students and 1 was earning a certificate.



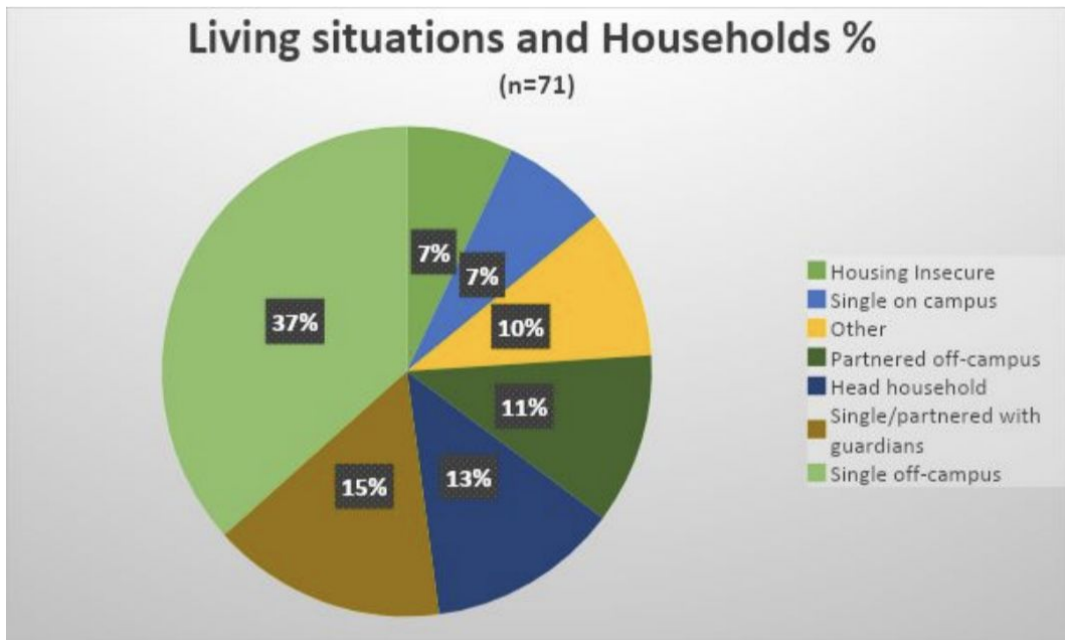
Participants were then asked to indicate their credit loads (as part time or full time). Of the 66 who responded (n=66), 8 students identified as part time, 53 students identified as full time, and 5 respondents named a different status.



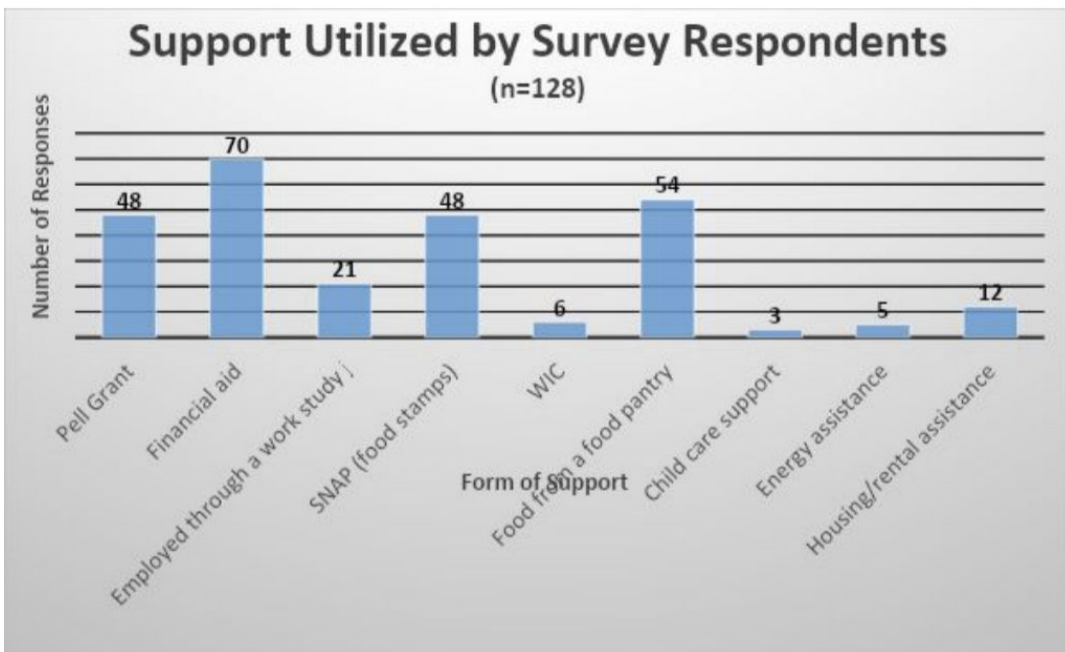
3. Living Situations and Resources

To better identify student needs and experiences, listening circle questionnaires also gathered information about participants' living situations, financial aid, non-financial resources and their experiences of food insecurity.

Participants were first asked to describe their living situations and then define their households. Of 71 responses, 5 indicated they were single and lived on-campus; 26 respondents were single and lived off-campus; 8 were partnered living off-campus; 11 respondents lived with parents or guardians; 9 were the heads of their households with children or other dependents; 5 were housing insecure; and 7 identified other living situations.



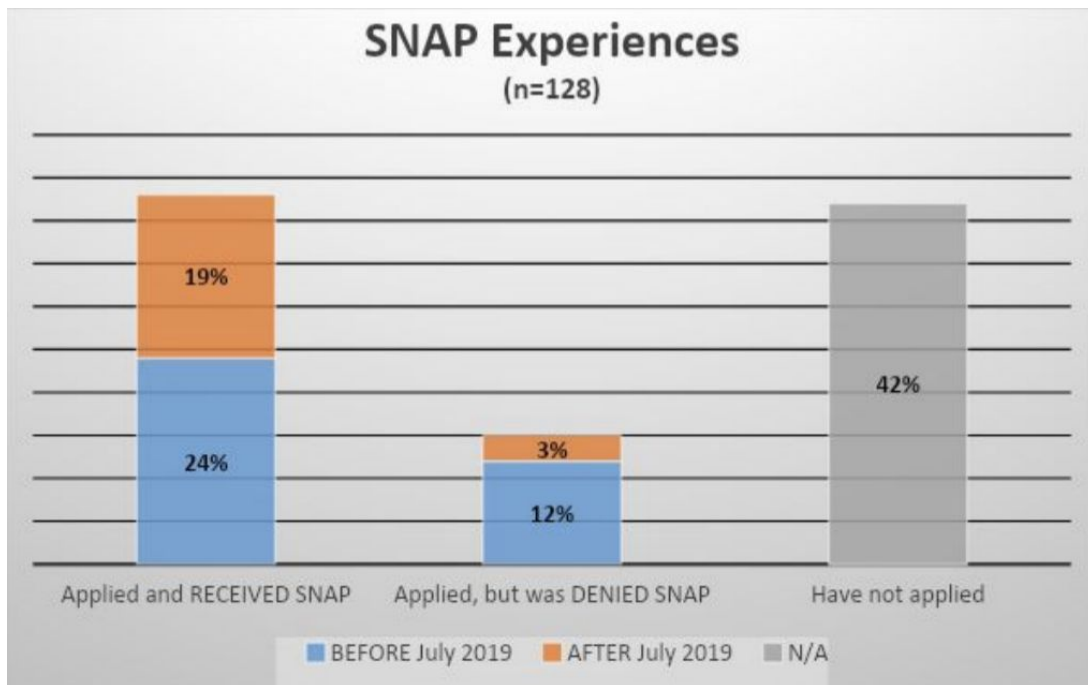
Participants were also asked to include information regarding the financial and non-financial aid they received to support themselves while attending college. Of 69 responses (including multiple selection of aids), 32 respondents had received a Pell Grant; 46 respondents had received financial-aid through the school; 19 were employed via Work Study; 11 indicated they would like to have a Work Study job on their FAFSA applications; 27 received SNAP; 5 received WIC; 2 received child care assistance; 5 received energy assistance; and 7 received housing/rental assistance. Additionally, 35 respondents indicated they had used school and community food pantries.



4. Food Insecurity

Finally, participants in the listening circles were also asked questions about their experiences with food security over the previous 12 months.

Of the 67 participants who responded to this question, 48 indicated they had experienced food insecurity as a student in the past 12 months or were currently experiencing it; 18 respondents had not experienced food insecurity in the previous year; and 1 indicated (s)he had experienced it longer than 12 months ago.



Combined Summary: 2020 Survey and Listening Circle Questionnaires

The following section provides a brief overview of survey respondents' and listening circle participants' combined characteristics. In total, this project captured 197 unique responses between the two data collection methods.

Gender Distribution:

This project collected 164 responses on self-identified gender. Of these, 90 identified as Cisgender Women or Females (55%); 36 identified as Cisgender Men or Males (22%); 4 identified as transgender (~2%); 21 identified as gender nonbinary or nonconforming (13%); 3 identified separately (2%); and 12 declined or failed to respond (~7%).

Age Distribution:

When asked about their ages, 156 individuals responded. Of these, 51 were under the age of 21 (32%); 51 were in their 20's (32%); 27 were in their 30's (17%); 21 were in their 40's (13%); and 9 were 50 years or above (6%).

Race/Ethnicity Distribution:

One hundred and seventy-nine (179) respondents self-identified their race/ethnicity. Of these, 36 identified as Hispanic/Latinx; 11 identified as Descendant of the African Diaspora (Black, African, African-American, etc); 11 identified as Native American/American Indian/Alaska Native; 15 identified as Asian or Pacific Islander; 45 identified as White/Caucasian; and 7 identified other racial/ethnic backgrounds.

Student Academic Level:

Students in this project were enrolled in programs ranging from certifications to graduate degrees. Of 157 responses, 55 students were working on an Associate's degrees (35%); 64 were in the process of earning a Bachelor's degree (41%); 16 were in a graduate program (10%); 7 were enrolled in a certificate program (4%); and 15 were enrolled in another program (10%).

Academic Workload:

Of 156 responses regarding student credit load, 116 indicated they were attending school full time (74%); 34 students identified as part time (22%), and 7 students indicated another status (4%).

Housing Insecurity Experiences:

Participants were also asked about their housing experiences. Of 180 responses, 21 students (11%) indicated that they had experienced or were currently experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity.

Food Insecurity Experiences:

Finally, all participants were asked if they had experienced, or were currently experiencing, food insecurity. Of 167 responses, 119 indicated they had experienced food insecurity in the last 12 months, while only 28 indicated that they had *not* experienced food insecurity in the same time period.

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