

THE GREAT STUDENT SQUEEZE: SKYROCKETING COSTS AND UNMET BASIC NEEDS ARE IMPACTING STUDENT SUCCESS: IMPLICATIONS FOR OREGON

SHORT SUMMARY

Student hunger has been gaining attention in recent years because of the alarming reality that **college students are four times more likely to experience hunger than the general population**. This report gathers national and Oregon-specific data to illustrate how student hunger is a widespread issue with specific impacts for students who experience marginalization, as well as the impact that student hunger has on student success.

COST INCREASES FOR STUDENTS WITHOUT FINANCIAL AID AND WAGE CHANGES

- There have been huge tuition increases in recent years.
 - Nationwide, tuition increases of 40% at four-year public universities and almost 30% at two-year colleges between 2005-6 and 2015-6 academic years as less funding has been allocated federally and in Oregon for higher education.
 - Oregon has become a high-tuition, low-aid, low-campus funded state with tuition at four-year universities and community colleges significantly higher than other Western States.
- Living expenses have increased.
 - 85% of those making less than \$25,000 a year are cost burdened for housing—or spend more than 30% of their incomes on shelter costs. Sixty-three percent are severely cost burdened—or spend more than 50% of their incomes on housing. Half of those earning between \$25,000 and \$50,000 are cost burdened. Oregon's unhoused population is also disproportionately large
 - Childcare costs in Oregon are among the highest in the country.
- Financial aid has not kept up with the cost of college or living.
 - A Pell Grant covered 67 percent of a student's college costs in 1976, and only covered 25% by 2017. This leads to a large gap in unmet financial need for students.
 - Forty-four percent of Oregon students have unmet financial need after grants, family contributions, and earnings.
- And this has created a borrowing crisis.
 - Three-quarters of students receiving Bachelor's degrees are taking on loans, with an average debt of \$32,000. These figures are higher for graduate students, low-income students and students of color.
- All of this impacts student retention and graduation.
 - Nationwide, around 4 million students dropped out of college with unpaid loans between 2015 and 2016. Recent trends show a lack of college enrollment and low completion rates in Oregon.

...WHAT HAPPENS IS WE'RE NOT EATING BECAUSE WE CAN'T AFFORD IT. WE CAN'T AFFORD OUR RENT AND ALL THOSE THINGS. OUR HEALTH AND OUR MENTAL HEALTH COME INTO PLAY. 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.

- OREGON COLLEGE STUDENT LISTENING CIRCLE PARTICIPANT

STUDENTS' ESSENTIAL NEEDS SUFFER

- According to the 2019 HOPE Center's Real College survey, among Oregon community college students, 63% of respondents identified as food insecure, housing insecure or homeless. Oregon students experience basic need insecurities at rates consistent with nationwide student experiences or higher.
- Food insecurity, housing insecurity and homelessness among students have been linked with decreased academic performance, as well as lower emotional and physical well-being.

THE IMPACT IS NOT EQUAL

- Not all students are equally likely to experience food and housing insecurity:
 - Students identifying as BIPOC, non-cisgender, parenting, first-generation, former foster youth, and low income students experience significantly higher incidences of food and housing insecurity than comparable peers. They are also among the least likely to graduate.
- According to the 2019 #RealCollege Survey, among Oregon community college students:
 - Indigenous students experience food insecurity at 59%, housing insecurity at 67% and houselessness at 35%.
 - Black students experience food insecurity at 50%, housing insecurity at 61% and houselessness at 27%.

- Latinx students experience food insecurity at 46%, housing insecurity at 57% and houselessness at 18%
- Transgender students experience food insecurity at 61%, housing insecurity at 69% and houselessness at 38%.
- Nonbinary students experience food insecurity at 62%, housing insecurity at 68% and houselessness at 37%.

I WOULD LIKE [DECISION MAKERS] TO KNOW THAT COLLEGE STUDENTS ARE NO LONGER JUST THE TYPICAL WHITE CIS-GENDERED MALES. WHEN I FIRST STARTED COLLEGE IN 2013 I WAS A LATINA FIRST-GENERATION PARENTING STUDENT STRAIGHT OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL. IN ADDITION TO BEING 100% RESPONSIBLE FOR MY SON AS A SINGLE MOM, I WAS/ AM STILL A BIG PROVIDER FOR MY FAMILY AS FAR AS INCOME AND OTHER RESOURCES LIKE FOOD.

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- Student-parents experience food insecurity at 50%, housing insecurity at 65% and houselessness at 18%.
- Debt burden, time poverty, and high childcare costs (as well as decreasing childcare availability on campus) also significantly impact BIPOC and student parents, lowering their retention and graduation rates.
 - Black students take out student loans more than any other racial group and those who do graduate emerge with higher than average loans.
 - Student parents take on more than twice the debt of their counterparts, with single mothers accruing 2.7 times the debt of other independent women students and Black parents taking on more loans

than any other student parent group by race or ethnicity

- Low-income, first-generation students have a mere 21 percent chance of graduating.

COVID'S IMPACT ON COLLEGE STUDENTS ESSENTIAL NEEDS INSECURITIES

- Prior to the Pandemic, Oregon's food insecurity rate was close to the national average of 10.5%, but the impact of this was not felt equally. Renters, single mothers, and people of color, especially those who identify as Black and Indigenous, had significantly higher rates of food insecurity. COVID made these numbers exponentially worse, with numbers never seen in Oregon in recent history. Food and housing insecurity, however, were before COVID-19 and continue to be higher for college students. Students in higher education are three to four times more likely to experience food insecurity than the general population and nearly half may be housing insecure, with one in six reporting homelessness.
- Despite all this, students accessed resources at low rates during the pandemic. Nationwide only 15% of students applied for SNAP during the early months of the pandemic, just over one-fifth of students applied for unemployment, and many students did not qualify for stimulus checks.

FUNDING STUDENTS ESSENTIAL NEEDS HAS A POSITIVE IMPACT

- Increasing funding for student basic needs increases graduation and retention which have a positive economic impact and helps address inequities in higher education success
- Connecting students to public benefits improves their financial stability and lowers their debt loads allowing them to focus on their education and worry less about surviving, which means they may be more likely to graduate. This has a positive impact on Oregon's economy by increasing family wages and raising the tax base.
- Key public benefits make a difference for students:
 - Studies show that a \$1,000 increase in grant aid boosts undergrad degree completion by around 5%.
 - SNAP makes a huge impact for those experiencing food insecurity and could for college students too, yet few receive these benefits—only 3% of undergraduates nationwide receive SNAP,

[SNAP] IS A DIFFERENCE OF EITHER ME GOING TO SCHOOL FULL TIME OR HAVING TO GO ONLY PART TIME CAUSE I HAVE TO WORK TO FEED MY FAMILY. I PROBABLY WOULDN'T BE GRADUATING THIS YEAR IF I DIDN'T HAVE THEM

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yet 18% are believed to be eligible by federal standards.

- Oregon's reinterpreted SNAP eligibility has increased access to SNAP for students but more qualifying students should be connected. If all low-income Oregon students were connected to SNAP that would mean over an additional \$2.5 million per year in direct basic needs support.
- Oregon has started great work to support students with public benefits access, but more investment is needed to increase equitable student success.
 - Pathways to Opportunity and the STEP Consortia (which began when House Bill 4043 was passed in 2018), focuses on connecting community college students to public benefits and providing additional resources to support SNAP participants access to higher education. Oregon State University's Human Services Resource Center, provides a strong single point of contact model for student resource support.

WHAT WE WANT FROM THE ADMINISTRATORS AND THE LEGISLATORS IS THAT THEY LISTEN AND UNDERSTAND US AND TAKE ACTION.

- OREGON COLLEGE STUDENT LISTENING CIRCLE PARTICIPANT

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OREGON

- Advocate to maintain federal student SNAP eligibility requirements implemented during COVID-19.
- Expand Oregon SNAP eligibility, if federal pandemic exemptions are not maintained, to account for graduate students and more student parents.
- Require Oregon colleges and universities to evaluate food, housing and childcare insecurity levels.
- Pass holistic Hunger-Free Campuses legislation, expanding current models to include housing and childcare.
- Increase funding for the Oregon Opportunity Grant or create additional need-based grants.
- Pass and provide generous funding to HB 2835 establishing benefit navigators at all Oregon community colleges and public universities and expanding collaboration between institutions.
- Increase funding to the Employment-Related Day Care program (ERDC) to better support student parents and provide a streamlined process for campus centers to qualify. Provide affordable childcare on Oregon campuses.
- Create affordable housing for traditional and "non-traditional" students.
- Create a college meal program, modeled after the Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program for K-12 students.



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