

Peralta Community College District Report of Spring 2017 Student Food & Housing Survey

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Background



Many community college students are tasked with having to manage external circumstances, such as securing housing and daily meals, while simultaneously attending to academic needs. Broadly defined, food and housing insecurity are social disparities that are inclusive of less severe and more widespread forms of hunger and homelessness.

Findings from a 2016 survey of more than 33,000 community college students attending 70 institutions across 24 states revealed that 56% of students surveyed were food insecure and 51% of students were housing insecure.¹ In regard to the most extreme conditions, nearly one-third of students reported “very low” levels of food insecurity

indicative of experiencing hunger and 14% of students reported experiencing homelessness. Meeting students’ basic needs is essential given that food and housing insecurity not only impact individual health and well-being, but can ultimately threaten academic progress and student success.

About the Survey

An online survey was used to identify the food and housing needs among Peralta students and explore how these unmet needs impact students’ academic success. Data gathered from the survey aimed to assess the rates of student food and housing insecurity as well as highlight the distinct characteristics and academic progress of students experiencing these conditions. All survey data were combined to get district-wide estimates. When viable, data were also analyzed and presented separately for each community college.

The survey contained 42 questions—adapted from previous research studies—in which students were asked about their access to food and eating habits (food insecurity²); living situation and housing-related experiences (housing insecurity³); economic experiences and use of available services (coping mechanisms³); college experience (student and academic characteristics⁴); and personal background. A list of local food and housing

resources was provided to all students who completed the survey. The survey was distributed in February of 2017 via email to students enrolled in courses for the Spring 2017 semester. A total of 693 students, from all four of the Peralta Colleges, responded to the survey. Among the survey sample, 21.8% of students reported being enrolled at more than one college within the Peralta Community College District for the Spring 2017 semester.

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Peralta Students' Food Needs



The U.S. Department of Agriculture's 6-item Food Security Survey Module² was used to assess food insecurity among students. Food security status is based on the sum of affirmative responses. "Low food security" and "very low food security" together represent "food insecurity." As shown in Table 1, 60.5% of Peralta students district-wide experienced food insecurity in the last 30 days. Of those students who were food insecure, 40.6% of Peralta students reported "very low" food security—the most severe form of food insecurity—having experienced hunger. There was some variation in the rate of food insecurity across the Peralta Colleges; nevertheless, roughly one-half to two-thirds of Peralta students had difficulties meeting their food-related needs.

African American (79.3%), Filipino and Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian (77.8%), Latino (67.9%), and multiracial (63%) students experienced food insecurity at higher rates than their peers. Peralta students who had children (69.6%) were more likely to have reported experiencing food insecurity than students who did not have children (57.6%). Across income categories, Peralta students with an annual household income ranging from \$5,001 - \$15,000 reported the highest rates of food insecurity (79.5%). However, 1 in 10 Peralta students (10%) with an annual household income of \$100,001 or more also reported experiencing food insecurity. Food security status did not differ significantly across gender, citizenship status, age, employment status, and hours worked while attending school.

Table 1
Prevalence of Food Insecurity Among Students, District-Wide and by College

Food Security (Last 30 days) ^a	PCCD (n=564)		College of Alameda (n=116)		Berkeley City College (n=229)		Laney College (n=196)		Merritt College (n=173)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
High security (score = 0)	169	29.9%	28	24.1%	66	28.8%	55	28.1%	67	38.7%
Marginal security (score = 1)	54	9.6%	12	10.3%	19	8.3%	24	12.2%	15	8.7%
Food secure (high and marginal)	223	39.5%	40	34.5%	85	37.1%	79	40.3%	82	47.4%
Low security (score = 2 - 4)	112	19.9%	24	20.7%	44	19.2%	42	21.4%	30	17.3%
Very low security (score = 5 - 6)	229	40.6%	52	44.8%	100	43.7%	75	38.3%	61	35.3%
Food insecure (low and very low)	341	60.5%	76	66.5%	144	62.9%	117	59.7%	91	52.6%
Affirmative responses to specific items in USDA 6-item food security scale: ^b										
The food that I bought didn't last and I didn't have money to get more. (n = 646)	404	62.5%	86	66.2%	165	63.2%	147	65.0%	105	54.4%
I couldn't afford to eat balanced meals. (n = 650)	428	65.8%	96	71.1%	176	66.9%	150	65.8%	115	59.0%
Did you ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food? (n = 612)	292	47.7%	62	47.3%	126	50.8%	93	44.5%	78	41.5%
3 or more days: did you ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food? (n = 604)	262	43.4%	58	45.0%	115	47.1%	88	42.5%	64	34.2%
Did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food? (n = 613)	298	48.6%	71	54.6%	118	48.4%	99	46.3%	80	42.1%
Were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food? (n = 616)	265	43.0%	57	43.2%	115	46.0%	82	38.9%	70	37.4%

Note. Food security status (food secure and food insecure) is in boldface. Missing data not included in frequencies and percentages in this table. The sum of frequencies across all colleges for each item (i.e. row) is larger than district-wide total count due to the respondents' ability to be enrolled at multiple colleges within the Peralta Community College District.

^aOnly includes respondents who answer all six items of the food security scale. ^bRespondents who indicated "Don't know" to an item were recoded as missing and were not included.

Peralta Students' Housing Needs



Table 2 illustrates the extensiveness of housing challenges encountered by Peralta students. Fully, 83.9% of Peralta students district-wide experienced at least one form of housing insecurity or homelessness. In particular, 83.1% of Peralta students indicated that they had experienced at least one form of housing insecurity in the past 12 months. In addition, 30.2% of Peralta students surveyed indicated that they had one or more experience associated with homelessness—the most severe form of housing insecurity. There was some variation in the rate of homelessness across the Peralta Colleges; nevertheless, roughly one-quarter to one-third of Peralta students lacked a residence in the last 12 months.

All American Indian/Alaskan Native students in this sample and roughly 9 in 10 African American students (92.7%) reported experiencing housing insecurity. Latino students (84.7%) and multi-racial students (89.8%) also experienced housing insecurity at higher rates than their peers. The rate of housing insecurity was highest among Peralta students between the ages of 25-29 years (92%). Across income categories, Peralta students who had an annual household income less than \$5,000 (95.1%) and Peralta students whose income ranged from \$5,001 - \$15,000 (91.9%) reported the highest rates of housing insecurity. Moreover, nearly half (53.7%) of Peralta students with an annual household income of \$100,001 or more reported experiencing housing insecurity. Housing security status did not differ significantly across gender, parenting status, citizenship status, employment status, and hours worked while attending school.

Table 2
Prevalence of Housing Insecurity Among Students, District-Wide and by College

Housing Security (past 12 months)	PCCD (n=603)		College of Alameda (n=128)	Berkeley City College (n=246)	Laney College (n=206)	Merritt College (n=186)				
	n	%	n	n %	n %	n %				
Housing secure	97	16.1%	21	16.4%	34	13.8%	29	14.1%	38	20.4%
housing insecure or homeless^a	506	83.9%	107	83.6%	212	86.2%	177	85.9%	148	79.6%
Affirmative responses to Housing Insecurity items (past 12 months):										
Any of the below items (n = 603):	501	83.1%	106	82.8%	211	85.8%	175	85.0%	145	78.1%
Have you experienced a rent increase that made it difficult to pay your rent? (n = 602)	273	45.3%	62	48.4%	116	47.2%	90	43.7%	73	39.5%
Have you been unable to pay the full amount of rent or mortgage on time? (n = 603)	197	32.7%	43	33.6%	72	29.3%	66	32.0%	58	31.2%
Have you been unable to pay the full amount of utilities (gas, oil, or electric bill) on time? (n = 602)	246	40.9%	49	38.6%	97	39.6%	76	37.1%	73	39.2%
Moved 2 or more times. (n = 591)	95	16.1%	15	11.9%	52	21.5%	25	12.4%	18	9.9%
Have you lived in shared residence with another family (related or unrelated)? (n = 603)	344	57.0%	83	64.8%	141	57.3%	121	58.7%	98	52.7%
Have you moved in with other people, even for a little while, due to financial problems? (n = 603)	180	29.9%	41	32.0%	77	31.3%	62	30.1%	39	21.0%
Affirmative responses to Homelessness items (past 12 months):										
Any of the below items (n = 593):	179	30.2%	32	25.2%	79	32.4%	57	28.5%	47	25.5%
Have you been thrown out of a home by someone in the household? (n = 593)	60	10.1%	9	7.1%	29	11.9%	20	10.0%	14	7.6%
Have you been evicted from a home by a landlord? (n = 593)	34	5.7%	7	5.5%	11	4.5%	12	6.0%	10	5.4%
Have you stayed in a shelter? (n = 593)	22	3.7%	7	5.5%	7	2.9%	7	3.5%	7	3.8%
Have you stayed in an abandoned building, in an automobile, or any other place not meant for regular housing, even for one night? (n = 593)	83	14.0%	13	10.2%	41	16.8%	27	13.5%	21	11.4%
Was there ever a time when you did not know where you were going to sleep at night, even for one night? (n = 593)	123	20.7%	20	15.7%	55	22.5%	40	20.0%	33	17.9%
Was there ever a time when you did not have a home? (n = 592)	123	20.8%	22	17.3%	48	19.7%	43	21.6%	33	17.9%

Note. Housing Insecurity and Homelessness prevalence are in boldface. Missing data not included in frequencies and percentages in this table. The sum of frequencies across all colleges for each item (i.e. row) is larger than district-wide total count due to the respondents' ability to be enrolled at multiple colleges within the Peralta Community College District.

^aThe insecure category includes respondents that are homeless (i.e. those who reported experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness).

Defining Insights: Impacts On Student Outcomes

Student Characteristics:¹



Food insecure students and housing insecure students were more likely to have reported *receiving financial aid, being a racially-minoritized student, being a first-generation college student, and having unit load of 12 or more unit* (full-time status) for Spring 2017 in comparison to their food secure and housing secure peers. In contrast, food insecure students (16%) were less likely to have indicated Spring 2017 to be their first semester as a student at the Peralta Community College District compared to food secure students (24.8%). Rates did not vary for housing.

Self-Reported Impact of Food and Housing Insecurity:

Roughly two-thirds of food insecure students (65.2%) and about half of housing insecure students (50.5%) reported that unmet food and housing needs impacted their education in the last 12 months. As shown in Table 3, Peralta students reported that hunger and housing problems affected their academic progress including their ability to perform well, attend class, and remain enrolled in courses.

Table 3
Educational Impact of Food and Housing Needs on Insecure Students, Last 12 months

"Yes" response	Food insecure respondents ^a (n = 302)		housing insecure respondents ^b (n = 471)	
	n	%	n	%
Have hunger or housing problems had an impact on your education? ^c	197	65.2%	238	50.5%
Have hunger or housing problems caused you to: ^d				
Done any of the following:	191	97.9%	227	97.0%
Miss a class	134	68.7%	151	64.5%
Miss a study session	139	71.6%	160	68.7%
Opt not to join an extracurricular activity	148	77.1%	173	74.9%
Not buy a required book	141	72.7%	162	69.5%
Drop a class	110	57.0%	127	54.7%
Not perform as well in your academics as you otherwise could have	172	88.7%	202	86.7%

Note . These questions refer to respondents' educational experience in general, within the indicated timeframe, and are not necessarily specific to their experience as a student at the Peralta Community College District. Missing data not included in frequencies and percentages in this table. Totals for those who reported doing any of the following are indicated in boldface. This table displays district-wide frequencies and percentages for each item among food insecure respondents and housing insecure respondents (i.e. each column).

^aFood insecure includes low security and very low security. ^bThe housing insecure category includes respondents that are homeless (i.e. those who reported experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness). ^cAll survey respondents were directly asked about the impact of hunger and housing problems. ^dFollow-up questions about specific impact caused were only asked to those who responded "Yes" to the initial question about educational impact.

Student Performance:²

- ◆ *The majority of food insecure students (69.5%) and housing insecure students (73.1%) reported a GPA within the 3.0 - 4.0 range, reflective of being in good academic standing.*
- ◆ *However, food insecure and housing insecure students reported having a Peralta GPA in the 3.5 - 4.0 category—the highest academic performance—at significantly lower rates than food secure and housing secure students.*
 - ⇒ Peralta students who were food insecure (36.6%) reported a GPA in the 3.5 - 4.0 range at nearly half the rate of food secure students (66.4%).
 - ⇒ Peralta students who were housing insecure (43.5%) reported a GPA in the 3.5 - 4.0 range at a much lower rate than housing secure students (63.8%).
- ◆ *Food insecure students and housing insecure students reported having a Peralta GPA in the 2.0 - 2.49 category—the most academically at risk—at higher rates than food secure and housing secure students.*
 - ⇒ Peralta students who were food insecure (11.1%) reported a GPA in the 2.0 - 2.49 range at a higher rate than food secure students (6.7%).
 - ⇒ Peralta students who were housing insecure (10.7%) reported a GPA in the 2.0 - 2.49 range at a higher rate than housing secure students (7.2%).
 - ⇒ Addressing food and housing needs is especially critical to retention given that these students risk being on academic probation if they do not maintain an acceptable GPA.

Academic Progress:³

- ◆ *Food insecure and housing insecure students spent **more hours per week**, on average, on school-related tasks than food and housing secure student counterparts – roughly 3 more hours.*
- ◆ *Food insecure and housing insecure students had comparable outcomes to food secure and housing secure students in terms of the **total semesters enrolled** at the Peralta Colleges – roughly 5 semesters on average.*
- ◆ *Food insecure and housing insecure students had comparable outcomes to food secure and housing secure students in regards to the **total course credits earned** at the Peralta Colleges – average total units in the low 40's.*



In short, students experiencing food and housing insecurity are attempting more units and working harder to achieve academic outcomes comparable to their peers, but their academic performance is compromised in the process.

NOTES: All analyses were conducted using descriptive and inferential statistics.

¹ Cross-tabulations and chi-square tests were computed for all demographic and student characteristics in order to identify statistically significant differences between food secure and food insecure students, and between housing secure and housing insecure students.

² Cross-tabulations and chi-square tests were computed for all academic characteristics in order to identify statistically significant differences between food secure and food insecure students, and between housing secure and housing insecure students.

³ Independent samples t-tests were used to examine differences between food security and housing security status, and reported academic behaviors and outcomes.

A Comparison of Rates

Table 4 presents summary statistics to facilitate the comparison of the rates of food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness among Peralta students with available data on community college students. Measurements used to assess rates among Peralta students closely resembled the instrumentation used in prior research conducted for the regional and national rates.^{1,3,5} Peralta students experienced disproportionately high rates of food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness relative to the rates of regional and national samples.

Table 4

Comparison of Peralta Student Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity, and Homelessness to Regional and National Samples

Community college sample	Food insecurity	Housing insecurity	Homelessness
Peralta Community College District (N = 693)	60.5%	83.1%	30.2%
Contra Costa Community College District (N = 730), <i>regional</i> ^a	54.7%	49.2%	14.0%
U.S. Community Colleges (N = 33,934), <i>national</i> ^b	56.0%	51.0%	14.0%

Note. Regional and national rates of food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness were derived from the same research study. Contra Costa Community College District data are a subsample of the national dataset.

^aPercentages of food and housing insecurity for the Contra Costa Community College District were obtained from: Stoup, G. (2017, March 15). Assessing student food and housing needs. (4CD Research Briefs ed. 1, vol. 1). Martinez, CA: Contra Costa Community College District. ^bNational percentages of food and housing insecurity were derived from Goldrick-Rab, S., Richardson, J., & Hernandez, A. (2017). Hungry and homeless in college: Results from a national study of basic needs insecurity in higher education. Madison, WI: Wisconsin HOPE Lab.

Implications

Survey results depict basic needs insecurity as being widespread, and highlight the specific food -and housing-related conditions serving as impediments for many Peralta students.

In short, the majority of Peralta students reported challenges with accessing sufficient, affordable, nutritious foods and securing regular, safe, affordable housing. These results illuminate the pervasiveness of student food and housing insecurity and shed light on the ways in which these conditions impact Peralta students' academic progress and outcomes.

Students experiencing food and housing insecurity are tenacious and display strong academic habits evidenced by their full-time enrollment and having achieved comparable academic outcomes. However, given students' self-reported impact of food and housing insecurity on their ability to perform well coupled with the higher proportions of students in the academically at-risk GPA category, these data infer that food insecure and housing insecure are not able to actualize their academic capabilities due to unmet food and housing needs.

As such, educators should not discount but rather consider these covert strengths, and promote student success by building on those assets and skill sets while simultaneously addressing students' basic needs. These findings corroborate a clear need for systemic action ensuring that equitable institutional supports are put in place to meet all students' basic needs for food and shelter that are a prerequisite for academic success.

Strategies for Enhancing Institutional Supports

There are several short-and long-term institutional responses for addressing students’ food and housing needs that can be put in place to normalize on-campus services for meeting students’ basic needs.

1) Invest in Cross-Sector Collaboration and Colocation of Services

As depicted in Table 5, 32.8% of food insecure students and 39.5% of housing insecure students reported that they did not use any services or programs while enrolled as a Peralta student. Low service utilization affords the Peralta Community College District the opportunity to establish a campus-based network of support services that connect students experiencing food and housing insecurity with existing resources.

Table 5
Use of Services Among Food Insecure and Housing Insecure Students, District-Wide

Service/program use while enrolled as a Peralta student	Food insecure (n = 341)		Housing insecure (n = 506)	
	n	%	n	%
Use of any food-related services	121	35.5%	159	31.4%
CalFresh program (SNAP - food stamps)	82	24.0%	110	21.7%
WIC (nutritional assistance for women and children)	23	6.7%	31	6.1%
California Food Assistance Program (CFAP)	6	1.8%	7	1.4%
Receive free food or meals from church, food pantry, or soup kitchen	55	16.1%	69	13.6%
Use of any housing-related services	65	19.1%	89	17.6%
Housing assistance (subsidized housing, public housing vouchers)	30	8.8%	39	7.7%
Utility assistance programs	51	15.0%	70	13.8%
CalWORKs program	25	7.3%	28	5.5%
EOPS/CARE program	68	19.9%	82	16.2%
CAFYES Program (Foster youth)	4	1.2%	4	0.8%
Medi-Cal or other public health insurance	136	39.9%	192	37.9%
Student health services/Campus wellness center	58	17.0%	85	16.8%
None of the above	112	32.8%	200	39.5%

Repositioning the Peralta Colleges as centralized hubs for reaching students experiencing food and housing insecurity will help minimize the barriers to accessing food and housing related assistance and ensure that eligible individuals are granted public benefits and able to easily utilize them.

2) Hire a Case Manager and/or Train Existing Staff to Serve as a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) for Food and Housing Insecure Students

This person provides direct services to students in need and also serves as the designated institutional staff tasked with staying informed about state policies related to food and housing that have stipulation for compliance by community colleges. For example, roughly 1 in 5 food insecure students (19.9%) reported having received services from the EOPS/CARE program and thus can be supported in applying for CalFresh given the AB 1930 (Skinner) legislation in place that deems EOPS students and students enrolled in a WIOA activity eligible for CalFresh, if they meet all other eligibility criteria.

3) Establish an “Emergency-Relief” Initiative at Each Campus

One viable option for providing immediate food assistance services on campus is to establish a campus food pantry. The Peralta Colleges can advantage of the funds available through the Hunger Free Incentive Grants in order to establish an on-campus food pantry and use the existing CUFBA toolkit for guidance.⁶

Students experiencing food and housing insecurity are highly motivated and can benefit greatly from simple, low-cost interventions. The Peralta Colleges have the opportunity to enhance equity and student success by committing to institutional change that reconceptualizes student services to support students’ basic needs security.

About The Report

This research was conducted by the author as part of a doctoral dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree: Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership at San Francisco State University. This summary report was created for the Peralta Community College District Office of Institutional Research in accordance with the permissions granted to conduct this study at the Peralta Colleges. Please contact the author to obtain the full dissertation.

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