



# California Student Aid Commission

**SEARS Spotlight on Food Insecurity and  
Update on COVID-19 Student Survey**

## Presented by:

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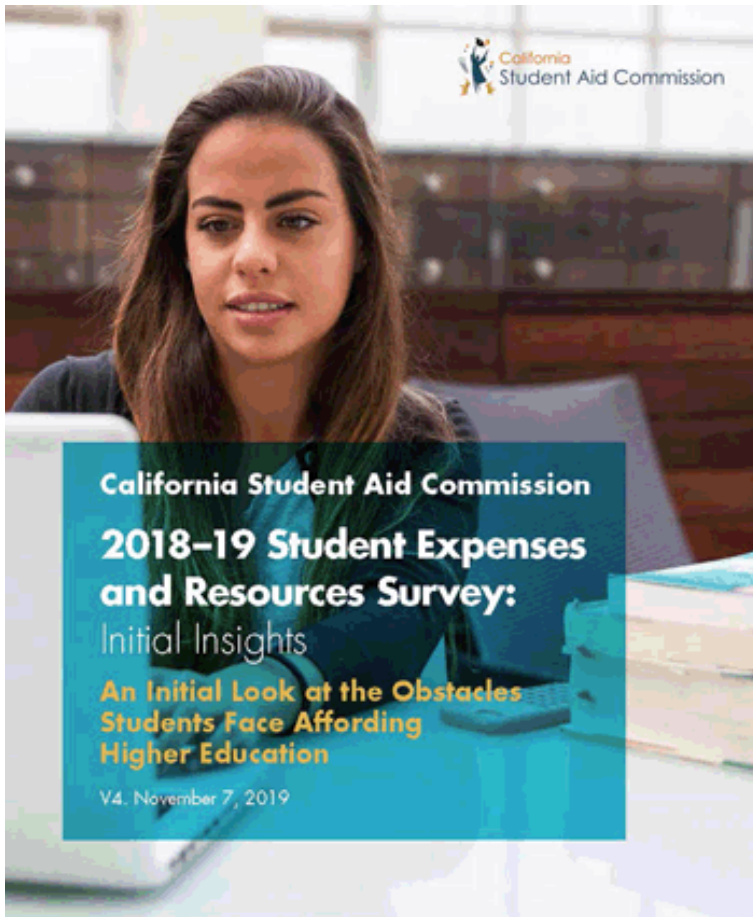
## In support and partnership with:



# Student Expenses and Resources Survey (SEARS)

- Completed in 2019 after 10+ year hiatus
- Funded philanthropically (College Futures Foundation)
- Administration and analysis by Mathematica
- ~15,000 responses
- Used to create CSAC “Student Expense Budget”
- Survey provided lots of rich data on the status of students basic needs, expenses, resources

# SEARS: Initial Insights



**Non-tuition costs add up to \$2K per month**

Fortunately for students, some costs—most notably, textbooks—appear to have declined significantly since the last SEARS. Students in 2018-19 reported spending about half of the inflation-adjusted 2006-07 total on textbooks and other educational supplies. Students were asked to estimate their costs for college beyond tuition and fees in the following categories: books and supplies, food, housing, transportation, and personal expenses. The statewide average reported by students totals \$2,020 per month, or \$18,180 per nine-month academic year.

**35% have low or very low food security**

**35% are housing insecure**

**Many students perceive they do not have enough to cover costs**

Unique to the 2018-19 SEARS was a series of questions asking students not just about their expenses or resources (such as work income), but their perception of their ability to cover the costs. For all major costs, students were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement “I have enough resources to cover the following expenses.”

Tuition and fees and housing and utilities were top areas for which students indicated they did not have sufficient resources. Specifically, 38 percent disagreed that they have the resources to afford tuition and fees, 35 percent books and supplies, followed by 30 percent said the same for housing and utilities.

**Nearly one in three students report food and housing insecurity**

The survey included two modules commonly used to measure housing and food insecurity: a 10-item set of the U.S Department of Agriculture (USDA) questions about food security and a 6-item set of questions about housing insecurity. Both items used a 30-day reference period. Based on their responses, 35 percent of students were classified as food insecure (defined as low or very low food security) and 35 percent were classified as housing insecure.

**Living costs, especially housing, vary significantly by region**

Unsurprisingly, living costs and other aspects of the college experience vary by region. The cost of housing, in particular, shows a wide variance across the 15 micro-regions of California – from \$753 per month in the Central Valley region to \$1,178 per month in San Francisco and San Mateo counties.

Similarly, the survey showed regional differences in housing and food insecurity. Housing insecurity was greatest in the Central Valley (42 percent) and Greater Sacramento (41 percent) regions, but met or exceeded 30 percent in all 15 micro-regions.

**5**

# SEARS: Spotlight on Housing

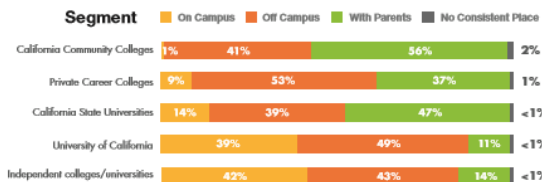
**SEARS SURVEY SPOTLIGHT:**  
PRESENTED BY THE CALIFORNIA STUDENT AID COMMISSION

## HOUSING

Where students live can have a big impact on their lives and success in college. Among other things, it can affect their financial security, ability to balance school, work, and family responsibilities, and access to nutritious food. This spotlight brief explores what students told us in the 2018-19 Student Expenses and Resources Survey (SEARS) about their housing experiences.

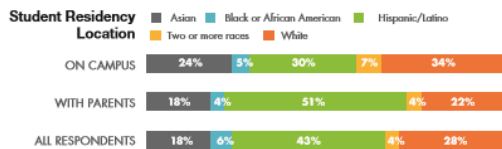
### Where do students live?

Each segment of higher education has a different distribution of where students live while attending college:



Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Hispanic/Latino students disproportionately live with their parents while white students disproportionately live on campus. Hispanic/Latino students make up 43 percent of students, but 51 percent of students living with parents are Hispanic/Latino. 28 percent of students are white, but 34 percent of students living on campus are white.<sup>1</sup>



Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

<sup>1</sup> Due to survey response rates, this survey did not collect statistically representative data on students from other racial and ethnic groups, but the Commission acknowledges that they may also be struggling with housing and other obstacles.



For more information please refer to our website <https://www.csac.ca.gov/sears>  
Contact [research@csac.ca.gov](mailto:research@csac.ca.gov) with any questions

“The main struggle is housing, since paying a huge amount for rent is very challenging. It also causes distraction, stress and inability to focus on studies.”

Student, South Central Coast

## 75%

of students age 21 and under across all segments either live on campus or with their parents.

“It’s been tough and hard to eat balanced meals and have a stable place to live. I had to couch surf for several weeks and sleep in my car due to lack of money.”

Student, East Bay

## How much are students paying for housing?

Students reported the following average monthly costs of housing:

**\$1,235**  
On Campus/dorm

**\$1,244**  
Off Campus: Rent/own

### Housing challenges students encountered within the last 30 days:

- 21% said they did not pay the full amount of a gas, oil, or electricity bill
- 18% said there was a rent or mortgage increase that made it difficult to pay
- 10% said they did not pay or underpaid their rent or mortgage
- 10% said they lived in a house or apartment with more people than were listed on the lease or rental agreement
- 5% said they moved in with others, even for a little while, because of financial problems
- 2% said they moved two times or more
- 1% said they had no consistent place to sleep (e.g. homeless, couch-surfing, living in a car/shelter)

### 35 percent of students surveyed experienced one or more conditions of housing insecurity

All in all, 35 percent of students surveyed experienced one or more conditions of housing insecurity. Students experiencing housing insecurity reported unstable living conditions, which included the inability to pay rent or utilities, or the need to move frequently.<sup>2</sup>

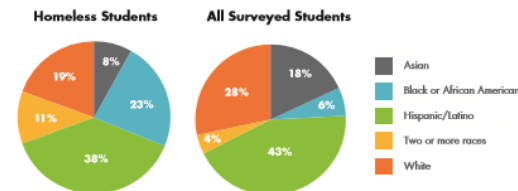
Students who were classified as housing insecure were more likely to be:

- older (age 22 and above);
- female;
- Black or Hispanic/Latino;
- having dependents

Housing insecurity is correlated with lower completion, persistence, and credit attainment.<sup>3</sup>

## Homeless Students

While Hispanic/Latino students make up the largest percentage of homeless students, black students are disproportionately affected by homelessness.



## 70%

of homeless students are age 22 and older.

<sup>2</sup> Those with no consistent place to sleep are classified as housing insecure and those on campus are classified as housing secure. These groups did not see the housing insecurity module. <sup>3</sup> Becker, K. M. (2017). The evolution of poverty in higher education: Material hardship, academic success, and policy perspectives (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, Wisconsin.

# Basic Needs Insecurity

## Housing Insecurity

- A condition in which a student's living situation is unstable due to challenges such as inability to pay rent or need to move frequently
- 6 item set of questions
- 30 day reference period

## Food Insecurity

- Limited or unpredictable access to nutritionally adequate food
- 10 item set of US Department of Agriculture's questions
- 30 day reference period

# 1 in 3 students report food and/or housing insecurity in the last 30 days

35%  
are housing  
insecure

35%  
have low or very  
low food security

19%  
are both housing  
and food  
insecure

# SEARS: Spotlight on Food Insecurity

## SEARS SURVEY SPOTLIGHT:

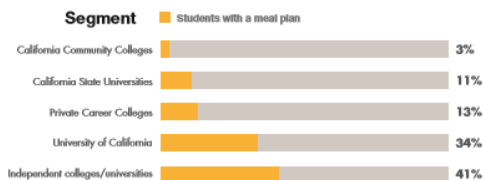
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## Food Insecurity

Affording college means more than just paying for tuition. A student must also pay for food, as well as books and supplies, housing, transportation, and other expenses. This spotlight brief explores what students told us in the 2018-19 Student Expenses and Resources Survey (SEARS) about their experience paying for food while attending college.

### How many students have a meal plan?

Each segment of higher education has a different percentage of students who report having a meal plan.



### How much are students paying for food?

Across segments, 10% of students reported they have a campus meal plan and the average number of meals covered per week was 12. Of those with a meal plan, students reported spending an average of:

**\$176/mo** for food they buy in addition to their meal plan

Of those without a campus meal plan, students reported spending an average of:

**\$316/mo** for groceries and other food and snacks eaten and prepared at their residence

**\$216/mo** for food, snacks, and meals away from their residence, such as at restaurants or purchased from vending machines



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“We college students try to make it through as comfortably as we can so it doesn't effect our education, even if it means skipping a meal or two.”

Student, Los Angeles

**Food insecurity is correlated with lower grades in college.**

“I love school. And I will not eat just to pay for school.”

Student, Orange County

“I have not bought books/school supplies to be able to pay rent/food.”

Student, Northern Indiana

SEARS was administered between fall 2018 and spring 2019; all CSU and UC institutions participated in the survey while CCCs, non-profit private institutions, and private for-profit colleges were sampled by region. CSAC conducted the survey on a web-based survey platform and students were given four weeks to complete it. A total of 15,419 students were counted as respondents (about a 10% response rate) at 110 institutions across 5 segments.

Students' level of food security was classified based on the number of affirmative responses to a set of 10 questions<sup>2</sup> and students with very low or low food security levels were considered food insecure.



Overall, 22% of students reported very low food security, and 13% of students reported low food security, for a total of **35%** of students experiencing food insecurity.

The survey asked about specific challenges students encountered with food within the last 30 days:

**56%** said they often or sometimes couldn't afford to eat balanced meals

**48%** said they often or sometimes worried food would run out

**41%** said that often or sometimes the food just didn't last and they didn't have money to get more

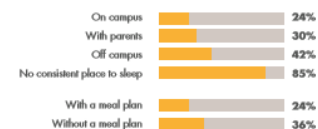
Of those who responded often or sometimes true to any of the above:

**65%** said they cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food

**58%** said they ate less than they felt they should because there wasn't enough money for food

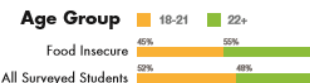
**49%** said they were hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food

Students living on campus and those with a meal plan reported lower rates of food insecurity than those without. Even though students living on campus and students with a meal plan tend to have more resources, almost a quarter of both groups still experienced food insecurity in the last 30 days.



Students who were classified as food insecure were more likely to be:

- older (age 22 and above);
- female;
- Black or Hispanic/Latino<sup>3</sup>
- Having dependents



The survey also asked students if they received food assistance from a variety of sources.

- 7x** reported using CalFresh/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- 5x** reported using an on-campus food pantry
- 2x** reported using the Women, Infants, and Children Program
- 1x** reported using a community food pantry or meal provider
- 1x** reported using other student's meal plans

Among all students surveyed, **87%** did not receive any food assistance.

Among food insecure students, **82%** did not receive any food assistance.

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Goldrick-Rab, S., Richardson, J., Schneider, J., Hernandez, A., & Cady, C. (2018). Still hungry and homeless in college. Madison, WI: Wisconsin HOPE Lab; El Zeln, A., Shalun, K., Colby, S., Ollart, M., Kallstrom, K., Brown, O., & Mathews, A. (2017). The prevalence of food insecurity and its association with health and academic outcomes among college freshmen. *Advances in Nutrition*, 8(1), 4. Manito, M. E., Swilling, A., & Link, H. (2015). Food insecurity among community college students: Prevalence and association with grade point average. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 39(8), 515-526.

<sup>2</sup> SEARS used the U.S. Adult Food Security Survey Module designed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/survey-tools/adult/>

<sup>3</sup> Due to small sample sizes, the Commission doesn't report on other racial and ethnic groups, but acknowledges that they may also be struggling with food insecurity and other obstacles.



# Food Insecurity

- **56%** said often or sometimes couldn't afford to eat balanced meals
- **48%** said often or sometimes worried food would run out
- **41%** said often or sometimes the food just didn't last and they didn't have money to get more

*"I love school. And I will not eat just  
to pay for school."  
-Student in Orange County*

# Food Insecurity

Of those who responded “often” or “sometimes” true to any of the above:

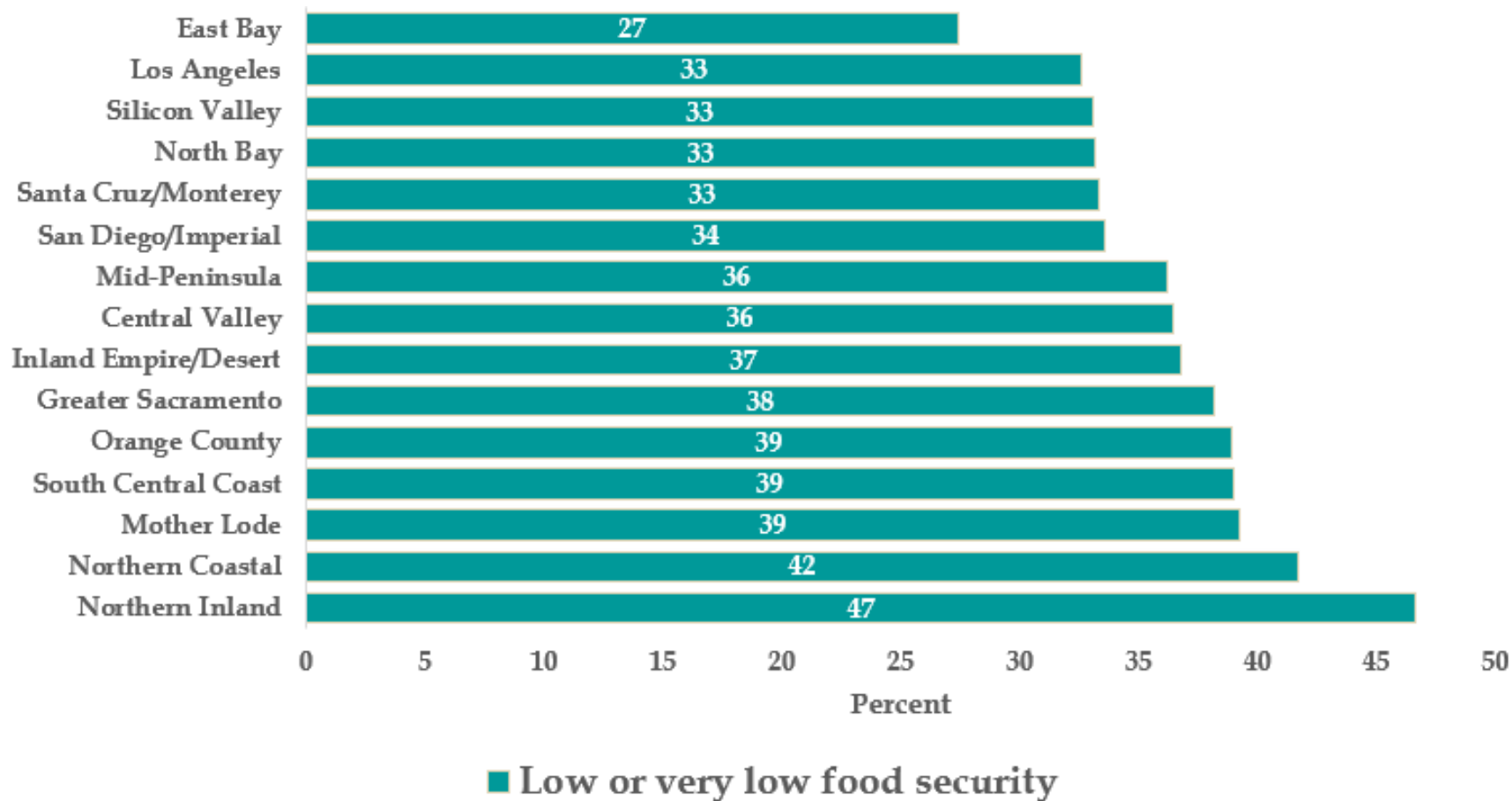
- **65%** said they cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food
- **58%** said they ate less than they felt they should because there wasn't enough money for food
- **49%** said they were hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food

*“I have not bought books/school supplies to be able to pay rent/food.”  
-Student, Northern Inland*

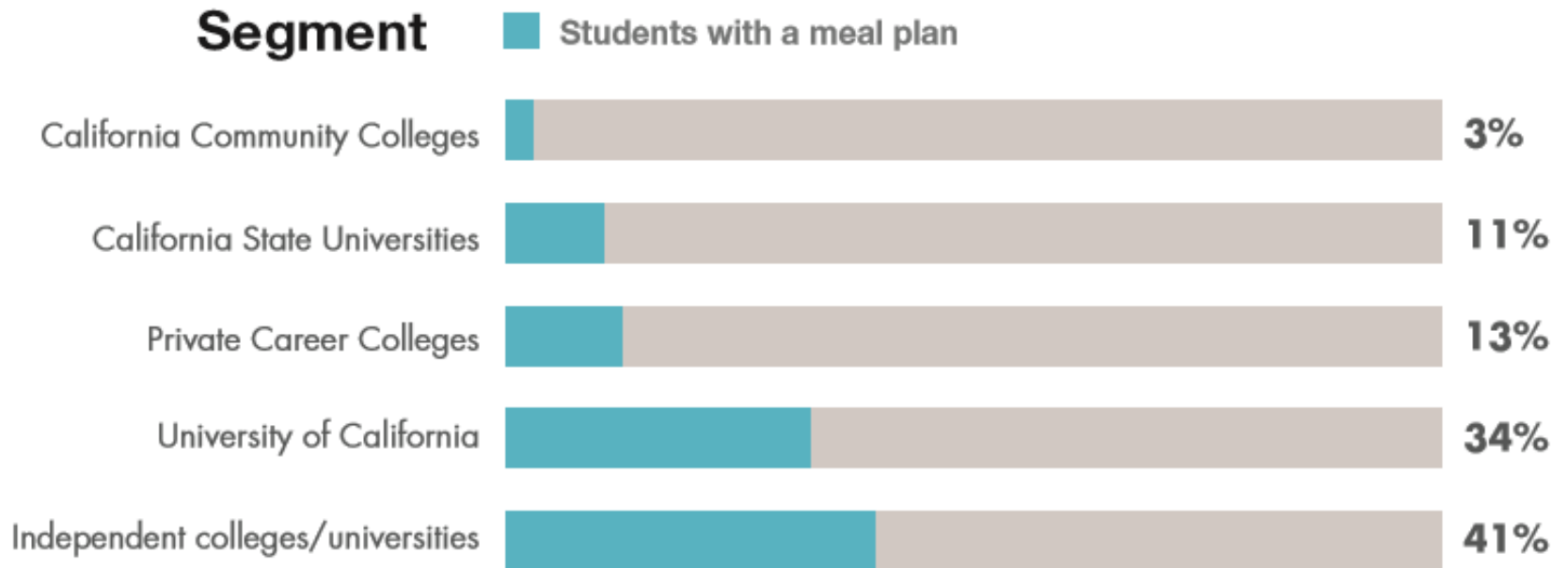
# Demographics of Food Insecurity

- **Students who were classified as food insecure were more likely to be:**
  - Older (age 22 and above);
  - Female;
  - Black or Hispanic/Latino;
  - Have dependents.

# Food Insecurity by Region



# Students with Meal Plans



# Costs of Campus Meal Plans (examples)

## Student Meal Plan

Fall of 2018 Lassen College is pleased to announce the New and Updated Cougar Café meal plan. Enjoy healthy food options prepared daily at a reasonable cost to you. Parents you can rest assured your students will be well fed and students you will be able to focus on your education and not on cooking and clean up. Students will enjoy thirty-eight meals a month. The Cougar Café is open Monday through Thursday 7:30 am to 6:30 pm for breakfast, lunch and dinner and Fridays from 7:30 am to 2:30 pm. The Lassen College meal plan begins the first day of each semester and ten percent of your meals purchased are available to rollover to the Spring Semester. Meals are non-transfereable. It is available in multiple payment options. Please contact Student Accounts to use your financial aid award to purchase a meal plan.

Total meals plan: **\$1150.00 : (24 Rollover) One meal per meal time per academic school day.**

150 meals plan: **\$975.00 (15 Rollover)**

100 meals plan: **\$750.00 (10 Rollover)**

- 150 meals @ \$9.75
- \$6.50/meal
- 84 meals per month=\$546

# Costs of Campus Meal Plans (examples)

## GOLD PLAN

Cost per Year	Approximate number of meals per week	Flex\$ per Year
2019-2020: \$4,906	15	\$150 (\$75 per semester)

Available to the Sac State community and all campus residents.

The Gold Plan is a great fit for athletes or students who stay on campus all week. The plan includes \$75 per semester in Flex\$, which may be used at any UEI-operated retail dining outlet. Ten guest passes to the Servedy per semester are included, so bring a friend, your professor, or a family member!

## GREEN PLAN

Cost per Year	Approximate number of meals per week	Flex\$ per Year
2019-2020: \$4,286	10	\$250 (\$125 per semester)

Available to the Sac State community and all campus residents.

The Green Plan is designed for someone who typically plans to dine on campus during the week. The plan includes \$125 per semester in Flex\$, which may be used at any UEI-operated retail dining outlet. Five guest passes to the Servedy per semester are included, so bring a friend, your professor, or a family member!

- Annual \$4,906 for 15 meals/week
- \$6.81/meal
- 84 meals per month=\$572

# Costs of Campus Meal Plans (examples)



\$1,940.00

Add To Cart

## 7-Day All-Access (Quarterly)

- Visit The Anteatory & Brandywine Any # of Times
- Use FlexDine at Campus Dining Locations
- Quarterly



\$1,649.00

Add To Cart

## 135 Meals + \$250 FlexDine

- Rolls Over Until End of School Year
- Use FlexDine at Campus Dining Locations
- Averages 5 Meals/Week for School Year

- \$1,940/quarter for full access
- \$7.69/meal
- 84 meals per month=\$646



# Students with Meal Plans

- Across all segments, 10% of students reported they have a campus meal plan.
- The average number of meals covered per week on these plans was 12.

# What are students paying for food?

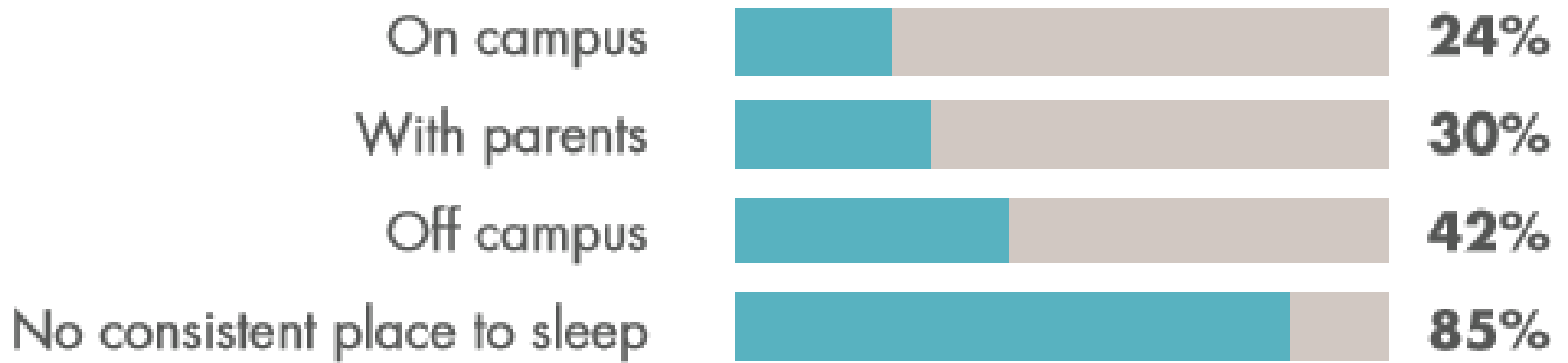
- If a student has a meal plan:
  - Students reported spending \$176/mo. for food they buy in addition to the meal plan
- If a student does not have a meal plan:
  - \$316/mo. for groceries and other food eaten and prepared at their residence
  - \$216/mo. for food and meals away from their residence (such as restaurants or vending machines)

# Food Insecurity on Meal Plans



*"School expenses are a lot and so are food plans. Five-day unlimited is all I could afford. Seven day is too expensive so I just don't eat on the weekends."  
-Student in Greater Sacramento*

# Food Insecurity by Living Arrangement



# Basic Needs Service Gap

- Among all students surveyed, **87%** did not receive any food assistance.
- Among food insecure students, **82%** did not receive any food assistance.
- Only **7%** of students reported using CalFresh/SNAP.
- Only **5%** reported using an on-campus food pantry.

# Questions

# CSAC COVID-19 Student Survey

- For planning and projection purposes in FY 20-21, CSAC needs to gather information from new and continuing students as to their plans for Fall, 2020
- CSAC working with UC Davis School of Education partners (Dr. Michal Kurlaender) on a "COVID-19 Student Survey"
  - Survey out in May, 2020
  - Results scheduled for June, 2020

# COVID-19 Student Survey

- Survey is a random sampling of ~250,000 students who filled out the FAFSA in the 19-20 and 20-21 FAFSA cycles.
- The domain would include all FAFSA filers, not just Cal Grant eligible or recipients.
- With this, we will have a wider range of students' EFC to evaluate results (effects of COVID-19 on more vs less needy students.)



# COVID-19 Student Survey

- The survey would be separated into two domains, each with slightly different (but many overlapping) questions:
  - A survey of “new” students, or those who would be first-time in Fall, 2020.
  - A survey of “continuing” students, or those who had previously enrolled somewhere in higher education.

# COVID-19 Student Survey

- A bank of ~ 20 questions maximum, to keep the survey brief (10-15 minutes.)
- A limited number of “open-ended” response boxes that allow a student to write in qualitative answers to certain questions
  - “How has COVID-19 changed your plans for college?”
  - “If you are not going to attend college in Fall, 2020, please tell us why?”

# COVID-19 Student Survey

- The link for the New Student Survey: [https://ucdavis.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_3ympnIB3ySyCEkZ](https://ucdavis.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3ympnIB3ySyCEkZ)
- The link for the Returning Student Survey: [https://ucdavis.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_1Y2LWFNBsH9IPs1](https://ucdavis.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_1Y2LWFNBsH9IPs1)

# Questions