



September 2020

# Housing and Food Insecurity at Portland State University

A report by:

**The Portland State University Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative**

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Homelessness Research  
& Action Collaborative

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# ***COVID-19 Results***

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*Basic Needs Insecurity During the Pandemic*



# COVID-19 Results

## Basic Needs Insecurity During the Pandemic

Due to the unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and its widespread impacts, we decided to conduct a follow-up survey designed to understand how the pandemic impacted students' basic needs security, academic performance, finances, and various aspects of their health and well-being. In early July 2020, an email invitation was sent to all 641 students who indicated in the original survey that they were willing to be contacted for follow-up research. We sent reminders at the same time each week for the following three weeks. Interested participants clicked the link provided in the email, which sent them to a Qualtrics survey with a full explanation of the study, informed consent, and links to resource pages about PSU-specific COVID resources and information about housing and health services in Portland. After completing the survey, participants had the option to enter a drawing for one of five \$50 Visa gift cards.

In total, 166 students (26% of those invited) completed the survey (see Appendix C for full sample description). It is important to acknowledge that this small subsample (representing just under 5% of the sample we surveyed in Fall 2019) is not necessarily representative of the broader Portland State community. These

are students who reported either lifetime or current experiences with homelessness, housing insecurity, and/or food insecurity in the previous survey. Thus, they represent some of the most vulnerable students, and we expected higher rates of basic needs insecurity among this group compared to the broader, more representative sample we surveyed in the fall. However, they also represent some of the most vital perspectives. If these students experienced housing and food insecurity pre-pandemic, we would expect them to experience a variety of educational, economic, social, and health challenges much more acutely as a result of the pandemic.

Given the very specific nature of this more vulnerable subsample, and also differences in how we measured and report variables pertaining to housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity (explained in more detail below), we discourage comparisons to the previous student results section, and to the broader Portland State community. This section is intended to serve as a snapshot of life during the pandemic for those students who were most vulnerable to its devastating effects, and who will likely need the most support in the months and years to come.

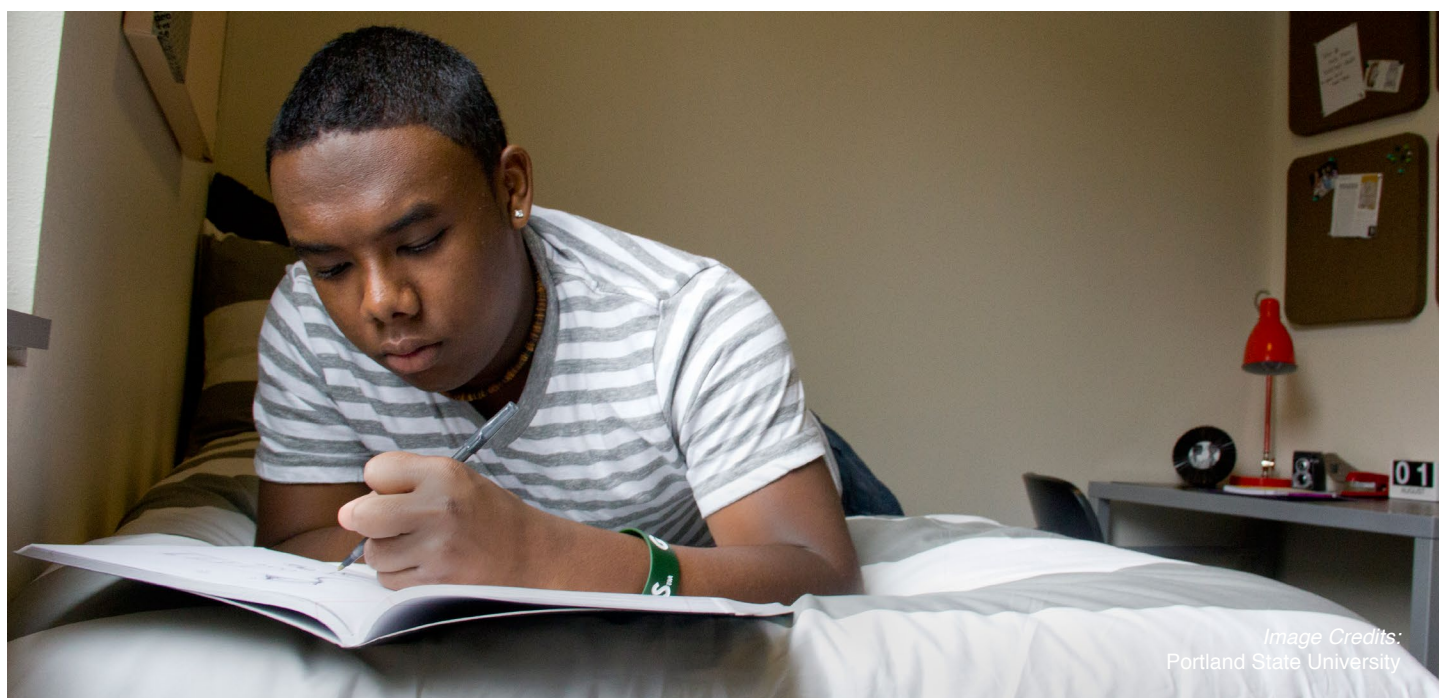


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## Student Housing Insecurity During the Pandemic

Student housing insecurity was assessed with most of the same items reported in previous sections of the report: eight items developed by the Hope Center asking about students' ability to pay rent and utilities, moving in with others because of financial difficulties, and leaving housing because they feel unsafe (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019), as well as three items from previous studies of campus basic needs insecurity (e.g., California State University, NC State University) asking about evictions and being forced to leave housing. Students were asked to indicate whether they had experienced any of these housing insecurity indicators since March 2020 (the beginning of the pandemic in Oregon).

Among the students who completed this follow-up survey, 64.5% ( $n = 107$ ) reported experiencing at least one form of housing insecurity since March 2020. The most commonly reported forms of housing insecurity were not paying or underpaying rent or mortgage (25.3%) as well as not paying the full amount of a utility bill (25.3%).

**FIGURE 30.** Students Who Experienced Housing Insecurity Since March 2020



**TABLE 26.** Housing Insecurity Among Students Since March 2020

Housing Insecurity Indicators	Percentage Experiencing
Experienced at least one form of housing insecurity	64.5%
Did not pay or underpaid your rent or mortgage	25.3%
Did not pay the full amount of a gas, oil, water, or electricity bill	25.3%
Had an account default or go into collections	15.7%
Moved in with another person because of financial problems	15.7%
Experienced a rent or mortgage increase that made it difficult to pay	13.9%
Left the place you were staying at because you felt unsafe	12.7%
Joined someone else's housing without telling the landlord	6.0%
Lived with others beyond the expected capacity of the house or apartment	5.4%
Got thrown out of the place you were staying at by someone else in the household	2.4%
Got evicted from your home	2.4%
Received a summons to appear in housing court	0.6%

$n = 166$

In this follow-up survey, students were also asked to indicate whether they had to leave their housing during the pandemic due to various circumstances (see Table 27). Almost a third of students (32.5%;  $n = 54$ ) had to leave their housing during the pandemic. The most common reason was not being able to pay rent, followed by feeling unsafe in housing.

**TABLE 27.** Reasons Students had to Leave their Housing During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Reasons for Leaving Housing	Percentage of those who had to leave housing
Inability to pay rent	64.8%
Feeling unsafe	38.9%
Problems with roommates	13%
Illness (self)	13%
Illness (someone you lived with)	7.4%
Illness (someone else you know who you had to help care for)	7.4%
Other reasons	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They were encouraged to leave student housing due to health and safety concerns</li> <li>• Owner sold the house they were renting</li> <li>• Lack of access to resources due to the location</li> <li>• Desire to be closer to family during the crisis</li> </ul>	31.5%

$n = 166$

“

*I moved to my parent's home. My sister and her son also moved here. It's a stressful environment, and it has made it hard to focus or get uninterrupted time.*

- PSU student, 2020

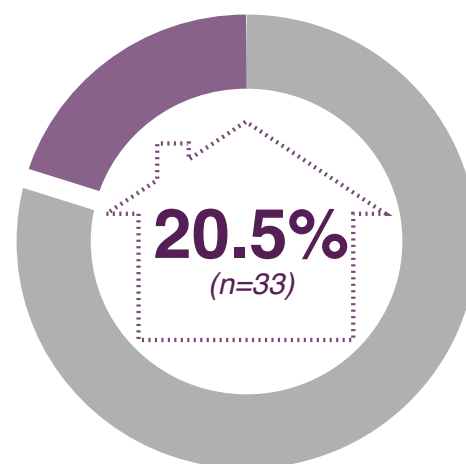
## Student Homelessness During the Pandemic

In order to assess student homelessness during the pandemic, we asked students to report the places they had stayed overnight in the 30 days prior to completing the survey using the measure developed by Crutchfield & Maguire (2017), which is described in more detail in previous sections of this report.

Over 20% of students in this sample ( $n = 33$ ) indicated experiencing some form of homelessness in the past 30 days.

The most commonly experienced form of homelessness was staying temporarily with a relative or friend, or “couch surfing;” and staying in a closed area or space not meant for human habitation, such as an abandoned building, car, truck, or tent.

**FIGURE 31.** Students Who Experienced Homelessness in the Past 30 Days



**TABLE 28.** Homelessness Among Students in the Past 30 Days

Locations Stayed Overnight (students were asked to select all that apply):	Percentage Experiencing
Stayed at any of the following locations	20.5%
Temporarily staying with a relative, friend, or couch surfing until I find other housing	12.7%
In a closed area/space with a roof not meant for human habitation such as an abandoned building, car or truck, van, RV, camper, encampment or tent, or unconverted garage, attic, or basement	10.0%
Temporarily at a hotel or motel without a permanent home to return to (not on vacation or business travel)	3.0%
An outdoor location such as street, sidewalk, or alley, bus or train stop, campground or woods, park, bench, or riverbed, under bridge or overpass	4.8%
At a shelter	1.8%
In transitional housing or independent living program	1.2%
At a group home such as a halfway house or residential program for mental health or substance abuse	0%
At a treatment center (such as detox, hospital, etc.)	1.2%

$n = 166$

*I had to live on the street temporarily before finding a temporary home. I'm currently temporarily living with my friend.*

- PSU student, 2020



## Impact of the Pandemic on Housing Insecurity and Homelessness

Two open-ended questions asked students to describe the impact of the pandemic on their housing situations, and responses indicate that the pandemic has amplified students' difficulties with housing instability and homelessness. In particular, changes in students' financial situations brought on by the pandemic (e.g., job loss, not being able to find a job, unexpected expenses) have made them concerned about not being able to afford their rent, being behind on rent payments, and being unsure how they will pay back the money they owe.

”

***I'm draining every bit of savings I had in order to remain housed and keep my bills paid each month. It will run out eventually, and then I don't know what I'll do.***

- PSU student, 2020

“

***I've fallen behind nearly five months in rent... I will not be able to pay everything back once the [rent] moratorium ends in September.***

- PSU student, 2020

”

***Homeless prior to the pandemic but had to pass on a room when it was offered because my savings had dwindled too much to feel I could pay the second month's rent. I could have been off the damn street. Still hurts to think about.***

- PSU student, 2020

Further, many students described having to leave their housing and move in with others (such as family or friends) because they could no longer afford their rent. Some students also described how they do not feel safe in their current housing because of the pandemic and ongoing protests, and for some students this was a reason to leave their housing.

“

***COVID-19 caused me to lose my main source of income, so I had to vacate my apartment because I could no longer afford it. I am currently living with my mom since that's the only housing I can afford.***

- PSU student, 2020

”

***Left the dorms because I couldn't afford to stay, then couldn't go back home, so I had to take the train and live with a friend in California.***

- PSU student, 2020

“

***I felt unsafe staying in my apartment in downtown Portland because of possible exposure and the nightly protesting. I support the protestors but it has been difficult hearing flash bangs, helicopters wizzing, and having tear gas come into the apartment windows. It was also very stressful for our pets. We are now staying with relatives two hours away from Portland, still in Oregon.***

- PSU student, 2020

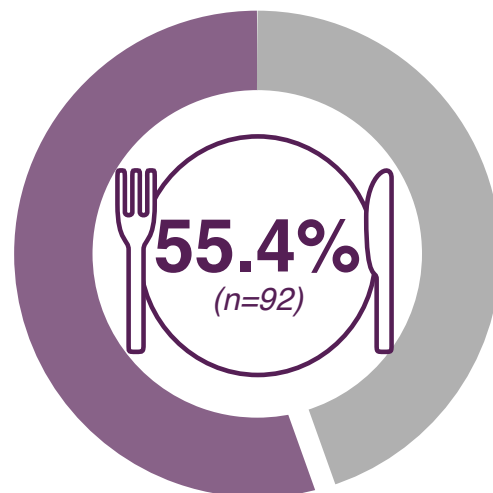


## Student Food Insecurity During the Pandemic

To examine food insecurity among students during the pandemic, we used the six-item validated measure of food insecurity from the U.S. Department of Agriculture instead of the 18-item measure. Students were asked to indicate whether they had experienced a variety of situations indicating food insecurity in the 30 days prior to completing the survey (see Table 29).

In total, 55.4% of respondents ( $n = 92$ ) experienced food insecurity in the past 30 days.

The most commonly reported challenges were not being able to afford to eat balanced meals and not having enough money to buy more food when what students had ran out. Further, 29.5% of respondents indicated that they could not afford their groceries during the pandemic.



**FIGURE 32.** Students Who Experienced Food Insecurity in the Past 30 Days

**TABLE 29.** Food Insecurity Among Students in the Past 30 Days

Food Insecurity Statements	Percentage Experiencing
I couldn't afford to eat balanced meals	55.4%
The food that I bought just didn't last, and I didn't have enough money to get more	51.2%
I cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food	45.8%
I cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food (3 or more times in the last 30 days)	41.6%
I ate less than I felt I should because there wasn't enough money for food	44.0%
I was hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food	32.5%

$n = 166$



Image Credits:  
Portland State University

## Impact of the Pandemic on Food Insecurity

One open-ended question asked students to describe the impact of the pandemic on their access to food. Students noted having to cut back on their food, compromise the quality of their food, and make difficult budgetary decisions to be able to afford food. Students also described that they could no longer get to grocery stores or were afraid to shop at grocery stores due to the pandemic. They also could not afford other options for accessing food such as curbside pickup or delivery.

***We've started going grocery shopping much less frequently because of not wanting to be exposed to the virus. This makes it difficult to keep healthier options like fresh vegetables in the house. We've also started eating much cheaper foods in order to stretch our food budget further.***

- PSU student, 2020

***I can only shop at Walmart because that is the only place that SNAP allows you to get curbside pick up. I cannot go inside stores due to my high risk status, and Walmart doesn't always have everything I need/like for food.***

- PSU student, 2020

Some students were able to reach out to family and friends for support with food, while others relied on public assistance programs such as SNAP and WIC. Some students described relying on food banks or free food options in order to meet their food needs during the pandemic, while others reported not being able to access resources for food that they relied on before the pandemic.

“

***I borrowed heavily from my roommate, parents, and credit cards to afford food.***

- PSU student, 2020

”

***I have been living off of food stamps and also free food from local food pantries. I have been going to the PSU food pantry once per week... and also going to another local food bank... I am so grateful to have access to these food resources, but also it is challenging because the selection isn't always great, and it makes it more difficult for my family to eat healthy.***

- PSU student, 2020

“

***I used to rely on the PSU food pantry for most of my calories, but now that I am unable to make it to campus, I find myself going to bed without eating most of the time or not getting enough calories on most days.***

- PSU student, 2020

## Racial Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurity Amplified by COVID

“

***Black Americans have a higher likelihood to die because of systemic racism in healthcare. We are scared. It was bad enough dealing with racism prior to Rona.***

- PSU student, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). Black and Latino/a/x Americans are twice as likely to contract and die from COVID-19 compared to White people (Oppel et al., 2020). Native Americans make up over half of COVID-19 cases in New Mexico, and the Navajo Nation has the highest infection rate per capita in the United States (Cheetham, 2020). Asians and Asian Americans have been targets of physical and verbal attacks and hate crimes since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

Along with the greater likelihood of becoming seriously ill or dying from COVID-19, BIPOC students, particularly Black students, are experiencing high levels of racial trauma in the wake of multiple high-profile cases of anti-Black violence and racism—all on top of the stress of social distancing and remote learning (Quirk, 2020). Therefore, it was important for us to examine whether there were racial/ethnic disparities in the pandemic's impact on basic needs insecurity among the students we surveyed.

Overwhelmingly, BIPOC students experienced higher rates of basic needs insecurity compared to White students (see Table 30). This is in line with recent research conducted by the Hope Center, that found stark racial disparities in basic needs insecurity during the pandemic, with Black and Indigenous students reporting the highest rates (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2020).

In addition to higher levels of housing insecurity and food insecurity, their rates of homelessness during the pandemic were over twice as high as those of White students (30.6% compared to 13.2%). They were also nearly two times as likely to have to leave their housing during the pandemic (see Figure 33). Almost 20% of BIPOC students reported having to leave their housing because they felt unsafe, compared to 8% of White students.

”

***The fear of the virus, and seeing first hand how it has exacerbated existing health disparities. The only folks I've known that have had the virus are people of color.***

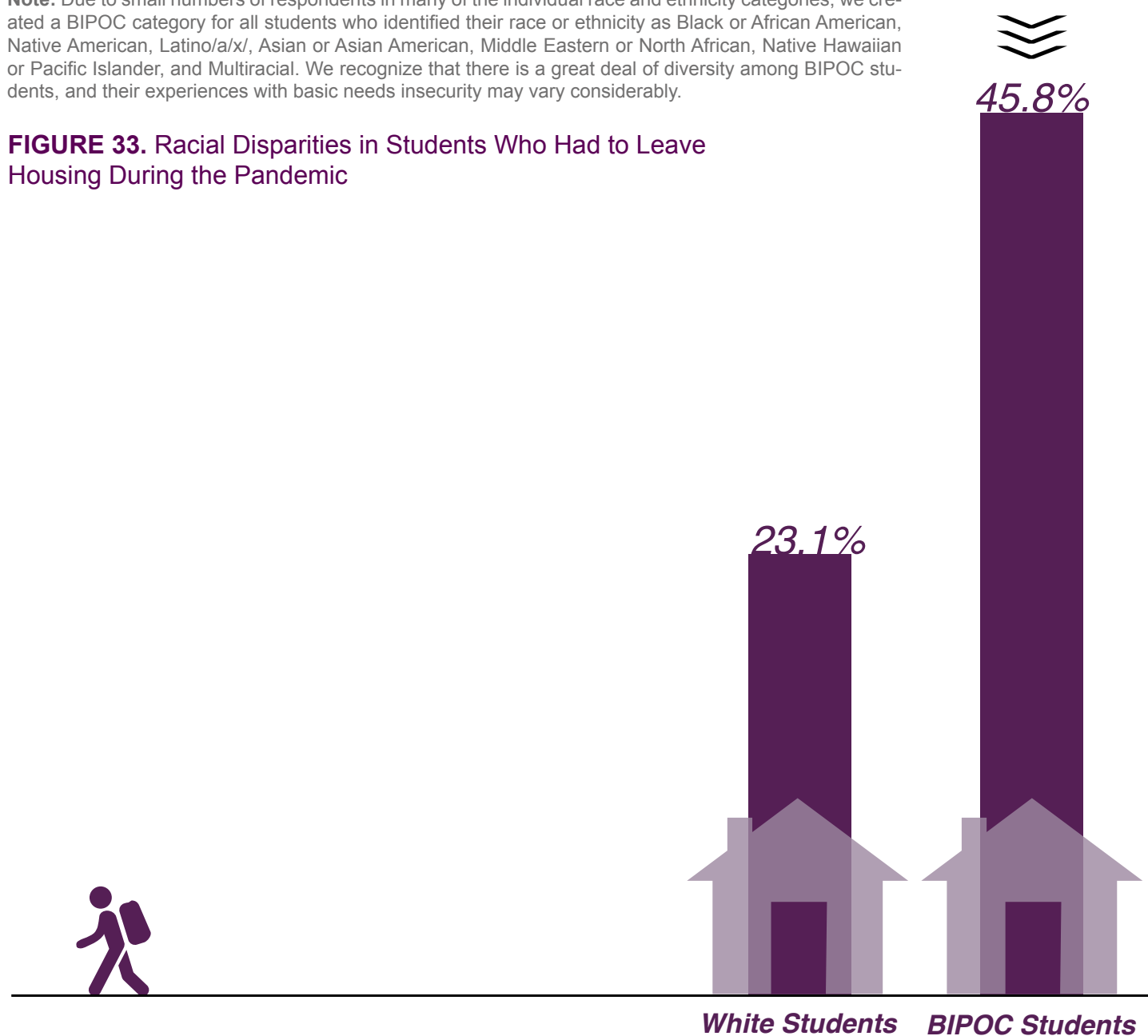
- PSU student, 2020



**TABLE 30. Racial Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurity During the Pandemic**

	Number of Students	Housing Insecurity	Homelessness	Food Insecurity	Had to Leave Housing During the Pandemic
Race					
BIPOC students	72	70.8%	30.6%	61.1%	45.8%
White students	91	59.3%	13.2%	49.5%	23.1%

**Note:** Due to small numbers of respondents in many of the individual race and ethnicity categories, we created a BIPOC category for all students who identified their race or ethnicity as Black or African American, Native American, Latino/a/x/, Asian or Asian American, Middle Eastern or North African, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and Multiracial. We recognize that there is a great deal of diversity among BIPOC students, and their experiences with basic needs insecurity may vary considerably.

**FIGURE 33. Racial Disparities in Students Who Had to Leave Housing During the Pandemic**


## Academic Challenges During the Pandemic

Students were asked to indicate how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted their academic progress, performance, and plans. Students who experienced housing insecurity, homelessness, or food insecurity reported higher rates of difficulties with the academic changes brought on by the pandemic compared to their peers who were secure in their basic needs (Table 31). Some of the most commonly reported challenges included difficulty accessing technology needed for online classes, staying focused, and making expected progress. Students with basic needs insecurities also reported more disruptions to their academic plans due to the pandemic (Table 32).

**TABLE 31.** Academic Difficulties Brought on by the Pandemic According to Basic Needs Insecurity

	<i>insecure</i>			<i>secure</i>
	Students who were <b>housing insecure</b> <i>n</i> = 107	Students who were <b>homeless</b> <i>n</i> = 33	Students who were <b>food insecure</b> <i>n</i> = 92	Students who were <b>secure</b> in their basic needs <i>n</i> = 34
Difficulty staying focused due to changes in how classes were structured	82.2%	79.4%	78.3%	61.8%
Difficulty staying in and making expected progress in the classes I was enrolled in for the spring 2020 term	50.5%	44.1%	53.3%	26.5%
Difficulty accessing class or learning materials	46.7%	44.1%	46.7%	11.8%
Difficulty accessing technology that is needed for continuing classes	38.3%	47.1%	34.8%	5.9%
Difficulty accessing online learning systems for classes (e.g., D2L)	23.4%	26.5%	20.7%	5.9%

**TABLE 32.** Impact of the Pandemic on Academic Plans According to Basic Needs Insecurity

	<i>insecure</i>			<i>secure</i>
	Students who were <b>housing insecure</b> <i>n</i> = 107	Students who were <b>homeless</b> <i>n</i> = 33	Students who were <b>food insecure</b> <i>n</i> = 92	Students who were <b>secure</b> in their basic needs <i>n</i> = 34
I had to withdraw from classes at PSU	25.2%	35.3%	26.1%	14.7%
I had to unenroll / drop out of PSU	9.3%	14.7%	10.9%	8.8%
I am unsure of my academic plans	38.3%	47.1%	39.1%	23.5%
Some or all of my academic plans were delayed by at least one quarter	33.6%	26.5%	31.5%	11.8%
The pandemic did not impact my plans for the upcoming academic year	27.1%	26.5%	28.3%	55.9%

## Impact of the Pandemic on Academic Plans

When asked to describe how the pandemic has impacted their academic progress and plans, students reported largely negative impacts due to the sudden shift to fully online learning. Many students had difficulty adjusting to this format, such as not having access to the resources they needed to succeed in the class as well as an increased workload compared to in-person classes. Students also described how the lack of peer-to-peer and student-instructor interaction negatively impacted their learning and academic performance.

”

***I had financial difficulties getting internet and was unable to get some course materials.***

- PSU student, 2020

“

***I was only able to take one class. Usually, I take three or four classes. It seemed like there was more work online than there usually is if I was taking a class in person.***

- PSU student, 2020

”

***The lack of in-person instruction and interaction with peers and professors made me feel less connected to the material and impacted my ability to learn and retain the information presented.***

- PSU student, 2020

Students also described challenges working from home, including distractions or obligations at home that made it difficult to focus on their classes and studying.

”

***I am a single mom. When schools closed in March and my daughter was then home 24/7, I had to help her with her online school every day, work from home, AND try to do all the PSU classes as well. I fell behind in all three of my classes... It made me decide to only register for part-time in the fall because my daughter will be home again.***

- PSU student, 2020



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Portland State University

“

***It is very difficult to study at home when I am surrounded by chores that need to be done, children that need help with homework, and needy pets.***

- PSU student, 2020



Finally, students described both short- and long-term academic impacts resulting from the pandemic. These included not being able to take classes needed for graduation; grades that suffered; decreased learning and retention; delayed milestones or graduation; choosing to discontinue their education or making other major changes to their academic plans; unexpected financial costs related to their educational pursuits; and stress or depression brought on by the pandemic that made it difficult to focus on coursework.

“

***My classes were cancelled because they couldn't be done remotely.***

- PSU student, 2020

”

***I was unable to graduate last spring. I am unable to go to school full time the following academic school year because I don't have enough money saved.***

- PSU student, 2020

“

***The isolation and anxiety made it difficult to focus on coursework. The inability to go to a classroom setting and interact with people directly left me feeling pretty depressed. I didn't perform as well as I could have because of it.***

- PSU student, 2020

## Job Security During the Pandemic

Over a third of the students who completed this survey (35.5%,  $n = 59$ ) reported being laid off or fired from a job because of the pandemic, with an additional 30% ( $n = 50$ ) reporting reduced hours or pay. Not surprisingly, employment changes were associated with basic needs insecurity.

Nearly 90% of students who lost their jobs or had reduced hours or pay reported experiencing housing insecurity, homelessness, or food insecurity during the pandemic (see Figure 34).

Of the students who qualified for and applied for unemployment benefits, nearly 40% reported that they were still waiting to receive them. Further, 62.1% of students with basic needs insecurities reported that plans for employment or paid work fell through because of the pandemic, compared to 29.4% of students who were secure in their basic needs during the pandemic.

FIGURE 34. Job Security During the Pandemic

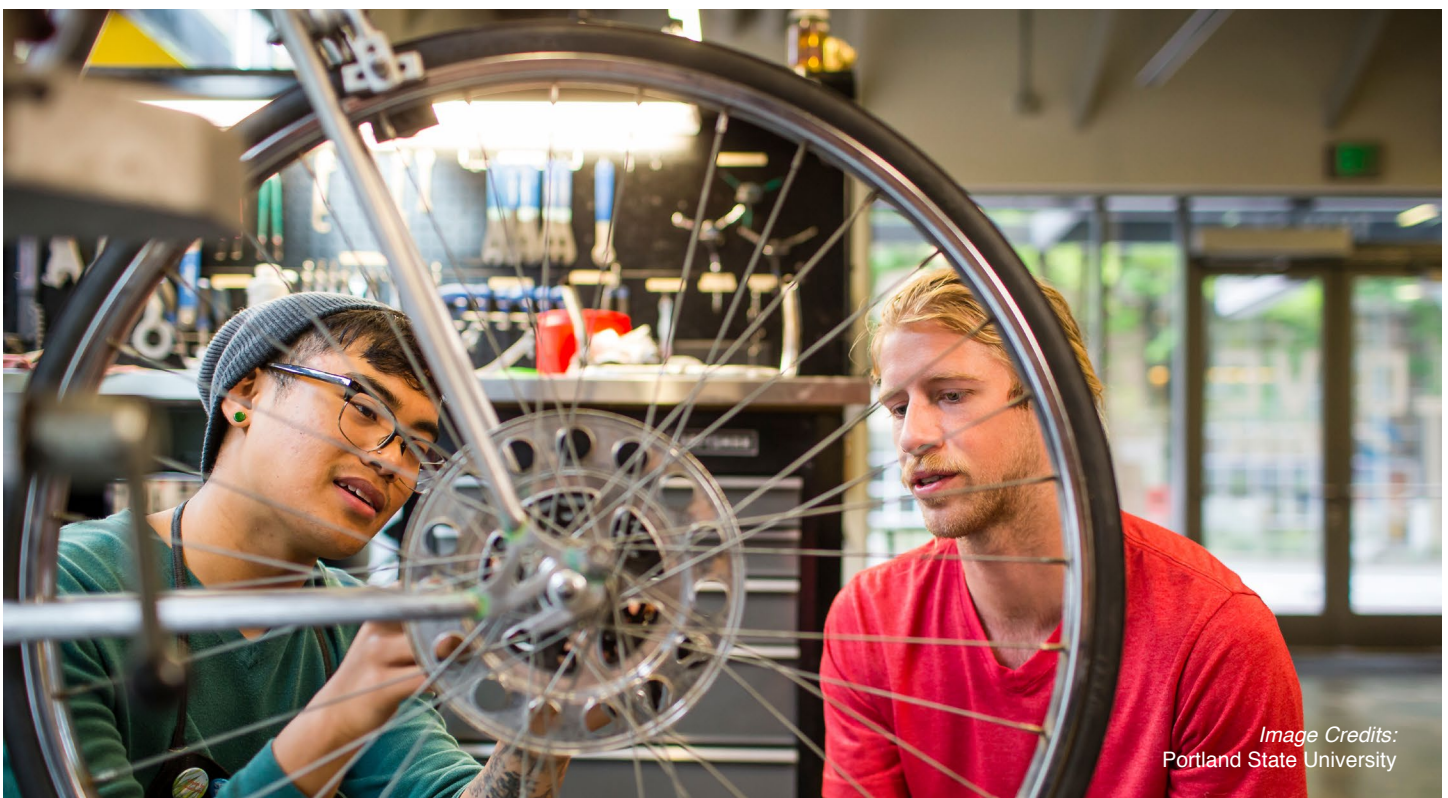


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Portland State University

## Impact of the Pandemic on Student Job Security

Students were asked to describe the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their employment and income. Similar to the quantitative data reported above, many students reported being laid off or let go, which made them unsure how to afford rent or costs related to attending PSU. Some students were waiting for their place of employment to reopen, while others students' places of work fully shut down or could not rehire them. Many students were also concerned about their job prospects after they graduate considering the unknown duration and economic impacts of the pandemic.

”

***My hours were reduced by 50%, I was forced to look for new work and the change in pay made me fall behind in my financial obligations which led to a very stressful homelife. My partner also lost his job, and I was the sole income earner for the household.***

- PSU student, 2020

“

***My source of income was heavily impacted by the pandemic. My mother, who is my second source of income, was furloughed. I live on campus, and paying rent and utilities is even more difficult than ever.***

- PSU student, 2020

”

***I don't have a job lined up, but I'm set to graduate either Fall 2020 or Winter 2020. The pandemic is making me worried that I'll enter a job market with no opportunity.***

- PSU student, 2020

Further, some students indicated that work they had planned on or were depending on in the future fell through, while others said that financial stressors pressured them into taking on work that made them feel unsafe.

“

***My primary job is driving for Lyft. Work decreased dramatically because of the lockdown, and driving has been more dangerous because of the risk of COVID-19.***

- PSU student, 2020

“

***... I had to scramble to find a new job. I managed to find a job... but my rent was late that month, I had to run up both of my credit cards, and now I have to work for a company that expects me to put my life on the line.***

- PSU student, 2020

Students also explained situations in which they were ineligible for unemployment benefits or had not received much-needed unemployment checks.

”

***As a seasonal worker who consistently switches between the same two seasonal workplaces every year, I was not eligible for unemployment benefits... I applied for the PUA [Pandemic Unemployment Assistance] that was supposed to be for people who weren't eligible for normal unemployment... [I] have not seen any confirmation toward that... let alone any money.***

- PSU student, 2020

“

***I had reduced hours and staggered shifts. But because we had an outbreak at our work, they closed entirely for a month. Unemployment has not completed processing my application and it's been almost three months since I applied.***

- PSU student, 2020



## Student Stories

### Loss of stability due to COVID

She drives a school bus to pay her bills while working toward her degree in criminal justice.

It's tough to pay for college without help or financial aid, she said. Amid COVID, it has become almost impossible.

When schools shut down in March, she lost her income. Unemployment isn't enough to cover her expenses. She skips meals several times a week to save money, and she worries what she will have to cut next.

"I lay awake wondering how I'm going to survive with the possibility of having to live in my car," she said.

Since March, she has missed three rent payments. Her landlord is working with her, but she has no idea when she will get her next paycheck.

In the meantime, she does her homework in the parking lot of her friend's apartment in order to access the internet.

She doesn't qualify for loans because of her credit. And she already reached the cap on financial aid support, which means she can't access the program where transfer students finish free either, she said. She was also turned down for money through the CARES Act Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund, she said, because her program is online only.

If she could attend full time, she would finish next fall. As it is, taking one class at a time, it might take another three years.

- Undergraduate student
- School bus driver
- Housing and food insecure due to COVID

"I'm eager to finish my degree," she said. "This has been a dream of mine for many, many years."

"Now I have to choose between my education and living in a home."

Still, she knows that it could be worse.

"I think about all the people who are going through this process who are on the streets. It hurts me that we have politicians that can't seem to look past their noses at the people we have on the street - students who are on the street."

“

***I lay awake wondering how I'm going to survive with the possibility of having to live in my car.***

#### Crisis Support

*This report covers a difficult topic and many of the personal stories include traumatic experiences including assault and identity-based violence. If you have experienced similar events or are currently struggling with these experiences, know that help is available.*

- Lifeline offers crisis support to all at 800-273-8255 or [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org).

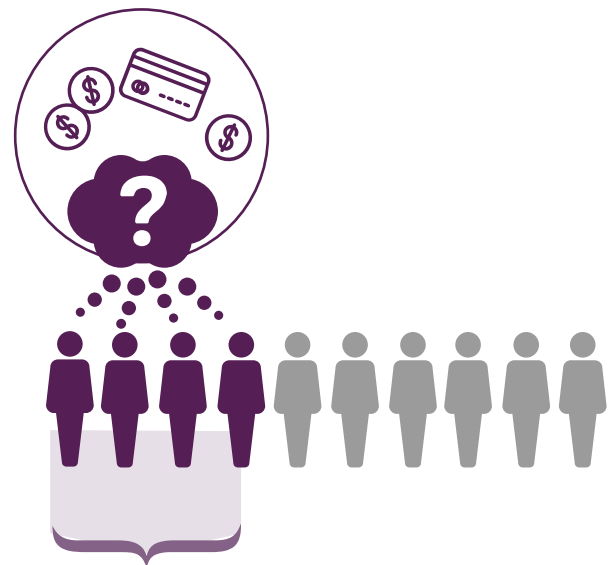
**Notes:** Employee stories come from personal interviews with employees who volunteered to share their experiences. Names have been omitted to protect their privacy.

## Financial Support During the Pandemic

Students were also asked about a variety of campus-based financial resources and government supports they may have used to help pay for their basic needs during the pandemic. Nearly 70% of students indicated that they qualified for the CARES stimulus check, and 93% had received that check by the time of the survey (July 2020). These rates were similar among both students experiencing basic needs insecurity and those who were secure in their basic needs.

Further, 55.4% of the sample received financial support from at least one PSU emergency fund. Students who reported experiencing housing insecurity, homelessness, or food insecurity during the pandemic reported receiving these funds at a higher rate (59.8% of insecure students received them compared to 38.2% of secure students), suggesting that this financial support went to those students who most needed it. The most commonly received PSU emergency funds were the PSU COVID-19 Emergency Fund (CARES Act) for students (received by 75 students in our study); the PSU General Student Emergency Fund (received by 18 students in our study); and the Services for Students with Children Jim Sells COVID-19 Hardship Fund (received by 10 students in our study). However, 4.8% of the students who applied for these funds had their applications denied, and 39.8% of students reported not knowing that these emergency funds were available from PSU.

**FIGURE 35.** Students Who Did Not Know About PSU Emergency Funds During the Pandemic



**39.8%**

of students did not know about  
**PSU Emergency Funds**

“

*The one-time funds were helpful, but the pandemic has gone on for much longer, and I am still in need of ongoing financial assistance. The CARES Act funds only got me through the first month, and now it has been five months with no end in sight.*

- PSU student, 2020

## Impact of the Pandemic on Student Finances

Students described a high level of stress due to financial changes that were a direct product of the pandemic, including financial losses such as diminished savings accounts. Students also described numerous unexpected expenses due to the pandemic, such as purchasing work-from-home equipment and costs associated with taking care of family members or children who were now staying at home, or sudden health insurance costs due to job loss.

”

***I had a savings account of over 3k in March, and that was wiped out when I was forced into quarantine and had to pay for the hotel for a 21 day stay in an extended stay hotel. I also had to get a storage unit.***

- PSU student, 2020

“

***I had to purchase home office equipment and upgrade internet access or be laid off. I also spent more on energy costs being home.***

- PSU student, 2020

”

***With my kids here all the time, I have spent [extra] money on food and activities to keep them active and entertained so I could both work and attend school, and I am still paying for daycare to maintain their spots.***

- PSU student, 2020

While many students benefited from PSU emergency funds, a large number of students indicated not knowing that these emergency funding sources were available to them. Some students also indicated that they did not qualify for the funds despite being in a difficult financial situation caused by the pandemic.

”

***I had no idea that this many resources existed. I am a part of two of these colleges, and they never informed me that they had funds if I needed them. I feel let down.***

- PSU student, 2020



Image Credits:  
Bethany Legg - Unsplash

“

***I tried really hard, but because I had chosen all online classes for the last (spring) term, they all told me I did not qualify. I was very devastated... I really needed the assistance.***

- PSU student, 2020



## Social Life and Health During the Pandemic

In addition to students' academic, employment, and financial experiences during the pandemic, it was also important to examine social and health impacts, and whether these differed based on students' levels of basic needs insecurity.

### Social Isolation

Given high rates of isolation experienced as a result of social distancing practices, we first asked students to rate the level of social isolation they had experienced during the pandemic on a scale of 1 = *not isolated at all* to 5 = *very isolated*. Students who reported feeling *isolated* or *very isolated* were categorized as experiencing social isolation. Rates of social isolation were higher among students who experienced housing insecurity, homelessness, or food insecurity compared to students who were secure in their basic needs (see Figure 36).

**FIGURE 36.** Percentage of Students Experiencing Social Isolation During the Pandemic According to Basic Needs Insecurity



## Staying Connected

Students were then asked to indicate the ways in which they stayed connected to friends and loved ones during the pandemic (Table 33). The most common methods were text messages and phone or video calls, and these methods did not differ depending on whether students experienced basic needs insecurity or not.

**TABLE 33.** Methods for Staying Socially Connected During the Pandemic

Method for Staying Socially Connected	Percentage Who Reported
Text messaging	88%
Phone call	79.5%
Social media	71.7%
Video calls	69.9%
Socially distanced visits (i.e., in-person gatherings that maintained a healthy social distance)	44%
Creating a “pod” (i.e., being quarantined with a small group of people who are socially isolated from everyone else except those in the pod)	20.5%
Non-socially distanced visits (i.e., normal social gatherings)	15.1%

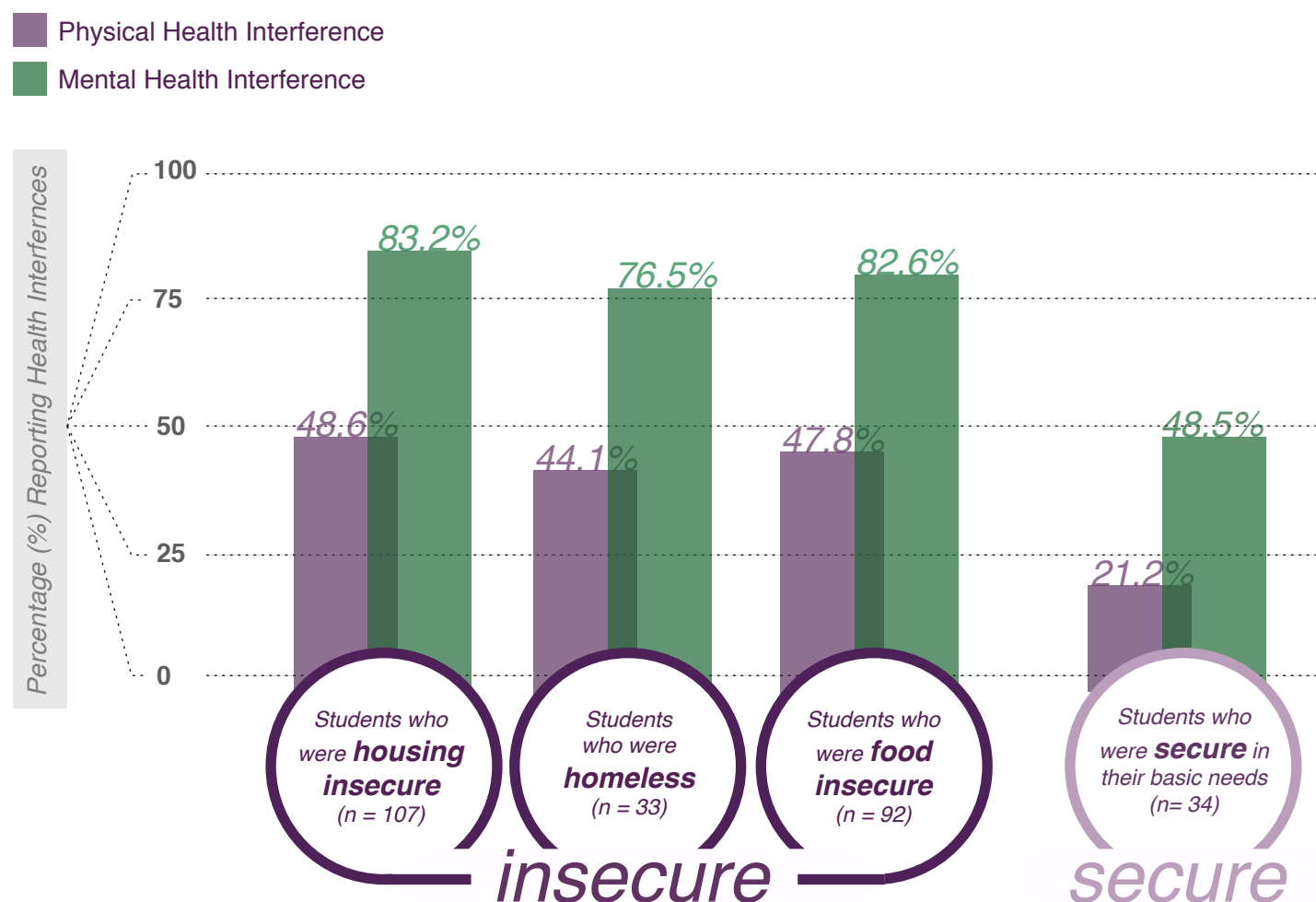
(*n* = 166)



## Health Challenges

We also asked students about a variety of health-related challenges they may have experienced as a result of the pandemic. First, students were asked to indicate the extent to which their physical and mental health interfered with their daily activities in the past month, from 1 = not at all to 5 = extremely. Students who reported moderately, quite a bit, or extremely were categorized as having physical and/or mental health interferences. As Figure 37 illustrates, rates of physical and mental health interference were higher for students who experienced housing insecurity, homelessness, or food insecurity during the pandemic compared to students who were secure in their basic needs.

**FIGURE 37.** Health Interferences During the Pandemic According to Basic Needs Insecurity



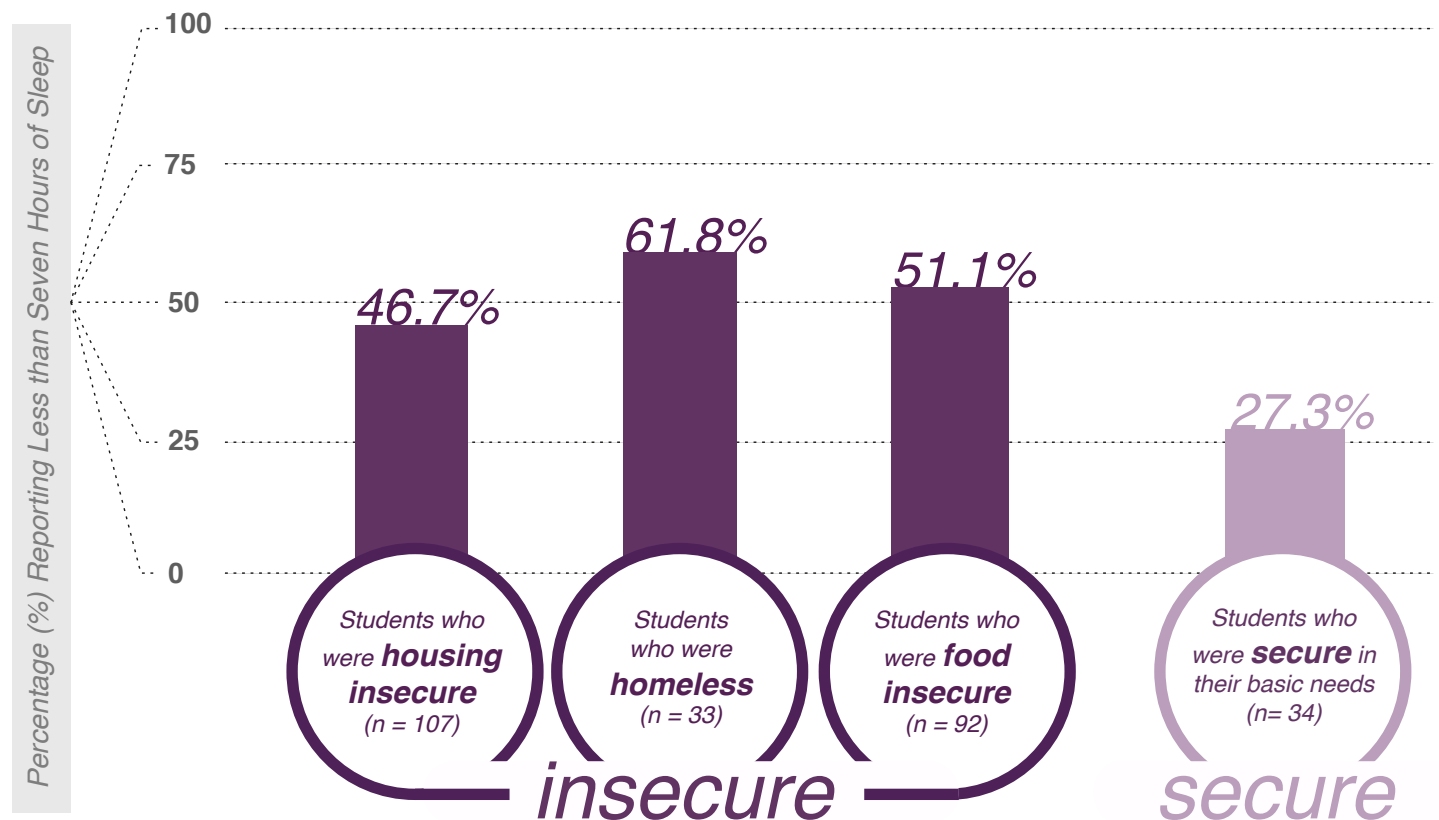
## Sleep

We also asked students to report how much sleep they got each night. While over half the sample reported sleeping seven or more hours per night, students who experienced basic needs insecurity during the pandemic were more likely to report sleeping fewer than seven hours per night compared to students who were secure in their basic needs (see Figure 38).



Image Credits:  
Portland State University

**FIGURE 38.** Percentage of Students Who Slept Fewer than Seven Hours Per Night During the Pandemic According to Basic Needs Insecurity





## Stress

Finally, we asked students to indicate the level of stress they had experienced in the past week on a scale of 0 = no stress to 10 = extreme stress. As Figure 39 demonstrates, students who experienced basic needs insecurity during the pandemic reported higher levels of stress than those who were secure in their basic needs. In general, mental health concerns were a bigger challenge for all students compared to physical health concerns.

**FIGURE 39.** Level of Stress During the Pandemic According to Basic Needs Insecurity



## Impact of the Pandemic on Students' Social Lives and Health

We asked students several open-ended questions about their social experiences, mental and physical health, and ways they were managing the impacts of COVID-19 on their lives. Students described drastic changes to their social lives and high levels of social isolation. Most students indicated that they were no longer seeing any friends or loved ones, and that they had not been leaving their homes or apartments except for essential errands. Many discussed the difficulties of staying in touch with loved ones only through technology as well as the impacts of social isolation on their mental health.

”

***I really crave personal social interaction face to face. It is hard for me to isolate and only talk on the phone or Zoom. I feel like It really crushed my emotional well being. COVID made my social life almost cease to exist.***

- PSU student, 2020

“

***I lost a family member during spring term and instead of grieving with family in person, it had to be done over the phone.***

- PSU student, 2020

”

***I don't hang out with my friends as often anymore... I feel guilty and paranoid that my friends might have COVID... [and I don't want to] spread it unknowingly. Now, I've been stuck inside and I feel like my depression has gotten worse. My depression has gotten so severe that I don't feel like reaching out.***

- PSU student, 2020

When discussing the impact of the pandemic on their physical health, students described being more sedentary due to staying indoors or not having access to the spaces and equipment they would usually use to exercise. Further, many students indicated interrupted sleep patterns, often due to anxiety, stress, or circumstances at home. Students also described changes in eating patterns, both positive (e.g., being able to cook at home and eat healthier) and negative (e.g., not having access to the healthful foods they once did and eating poorly due to stress or boredom). Of particular concern, some students described a lack of access to healthcare or health appointments due to the pandemic, which has caused some health problems to go untreated or become more severe.

“

***I have been so much less active. I used to take dance classes, and walk everywhere. That all stopped when we had to stay home. I now only walk to the grocery store and back about twice per week.***

- PSU student, 2020

”

***I've had increased migraines and chronic eye fatigue from constantly staring at my computer. I have experienced muscle soreness, joint stiffness, and I've thrown out my neck and my back from extended periods of sitting. I haven't been sleeping well because of the stress and because my back hurts so badly that I can't roll over in my sleep. I stay up later than I ever have, and I don't wake up feeling rested.***

- PSU student, 2020

“

***My [chronic illness] has continued to flare, and I have a ton of other physical health issues. I have had a hard time getting all my needs met since the doctors are trying to minimize in person care. I have had to go in for urgent procedures and testing, which has been scary.***

- PSU student, 2020

When discussing the impacts of the pandemic on mental and emotional health, students described heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and isolation. Some students also described increased irritability and an overall lack of motivation due to the impacts of the pandemic on their lives.

”

***Extreme lack of motivation and feelings of isolation. Stress due to course work and feelings of being near homelessness. Missing out on major opportunities... has had a big impact on my mental health.***

- PSU student, 2020

“

***It's terrible. Stress is the new norm, anxiousness around others has gotten worse, and I have fear of leaving anywhere to get anything because who knows what will happen.***

- PSU student, 2020

”

***I overthink everything and can't always focus on the priorities because of the impact on the world right now. I can't sleep and want to be an ally, be a good mother, teacher and friend. I need to be able to process all these things and new concerns and issues keep arising each day, it seems.***

- PSU student, 2020



Finally, when asked how they were managing the impacts of COVID-19 on their lives, students described a range of experiences. Some described having a difficult time coping with the changes in their lives and concerns for the future. Others indicated experiencing ups and downs and taking it day-by-day. Still others acknowledged the difficulties that they and others are facing while also expressing hope as they look outward and reflect on positive changes in the world around them.

“

*I no longer feel like myself. I do not feel resilient, happy go lucky, optimistic, and I have no hopes for changing careers when I graduate. I do not see the struggle ending soon...*

- PSU student, 2020

”

*I think I'm doing okay, but COVID has definitely changed the way I do things, my perspective on other people, and how my family functions. I am more worried about my family and food security, finances, and mental health than I was previously.*

- PSU student, 2020

“

*I have experienced and seen more food/resource sharing happening between friends, neighbors, communities. While it is scary and hard that this scarcity is happening, I have felt encouraged to see communities come together to help care for one another.*

- PSU student, 2020

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# ***Appendices***

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## Appendix A

### Student Sample Description

Student participants ranged in age from 18 to 73, with a mean of 27 years, which is similar to the average age of 28 among all PSU students. In the table below, we note percentages of students in our sample who identified with each demographic or student experience category. The number of students who responded to each demographic or student experience question is noted beside the label for that category. Where possible, we provide comparisons with university rates.

**TABLE A1. Student Demographics and Experiences**

	Student Sample Percentage	PSU Student Population (Fall 2019) Percentage* (n = 23,362)
<b>Race or Ethnicity (n = 3,304)</b>		
Asian or Asian American	12.5%	8.5%
Black or African American	4.2%	3.5%
Hispanic or Latino/a/x	14.2%	15%
Middle Eastern or North African	1.6%	N/A
Native American	3.2%	1%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1.9%	0.5%
Multiracial	5.4%	6%
White	69%	55%
Race not listed	0.3%	N/A
Prefer not to answer	3.5%	4%

**\*Note:** Comparisons between our student sample and the full student body should be made with caution due to differences in data collection and reporting approaches. PSU records only one racial or ethnic category per student, whereas students in our study were asked to select all that apply. Thus, percentages total more than 100.

**TABLE A1. Student Demographics and Experiences**  
(Continued)

	Student Sample Percentage	PSU Student Population (Fall 2019) Percentage* (n = 23,362)
<b>Gender Identity (n = 3,301)</b>		
Woman	62.8%	55.8%
Man	26.8%	44.1%
Trans Woman	0.3%	
Trans Man	1.2%	
Transgender	0.2%	
Non-binary, including gender fluid and gender non-conforming	4.1%	
Genderqueer	1.0%	
Two-spirit	0.3%	
Agender	0.5%	
Questioning or unsure	0.8%	
Identity/identities not listed	0.4%	
Prefer not to answer	1.6%	

**\*Note:** Comparisons between our student sample and the full student body should be made with caution due to differences in data collection and reporting approaches. Campus rates were reported as male or female, while in our study we included additional categories beyond the male/female binary.

**TABLE A1. Student Demographics and Experiences (Continued)**

	Student Sample Percentage
<b>Sexual Orientation (n = 3,276)</b>	
Asexual	3.9%
Bisexual	14.5%
Gay	3.1%
Heterosexual/Straight	58.1%
Lesbian	2.2%
Pansexual	4.3%
Queer	5.8%
Questioning or unsure	2.8%
Same Gender Loving	0.1%
Identity/Identities not listed	0.7%
Prefer not to answer	4.4%
<b>Relationship Status (n = 3,288)</b>	
Single	42.4%
In relationship(s)	37.8%
Married or domestic partnership	16.5%
Divorced	1.9%
Separated	0.6%
Widowed	0.2%
Relationship status not listed	0.5%
<b>Highest Level of Education Completed by Parents and/or guardians (n = 3,286)</b>	
No high school diploma	7.7%
High school diploma or GED	17.0%
Some college (but not college degree)	20.3%
Associate's degree	8.2%
Bachelor's degree	24.9%
Graduate degree	21.8%



**TABLE A1. Student Demographics and Experiences (*Continued*)**

	Student Sample Percentage
<b>Housing Situations Over the Past Year</b> (select all that apply) ( <i>n</i> = 3,511)	
Staying in rented or owned houses, mobile homes, or apartments, alone or with roommates	57.0%
Staying in rented or owned houses, mobile homes, or apartments with family members	44.2%
Staying in campus or university housing	21.4%
Sorority or fraternity house	0.2%
<b>State Currently Living In</b> ( <i>n</i> = 3,305)	
Oregon	95.2%
Washington	2.8%
Other	2%
<b>Student Life Experiences</b> ( <i>n</i> = 3,305)	
Transfer student	46.7%
First generation college student	33.8%
Current or former foster youth	2.5%
International student	3.9%
Out-of-state student	16.1%
ESL (English as a Second Language student	3.5%
Veteran	4%
Immigrant to the U.S.	4.5%
DACA student	0.9%
Student athlete	1.2%
Parent of a child under 18 who lives with you	8.9%
<b>Disabilities or Medical Conditions</b> ( <i>n</i> = 3,305)	
Learning disability	6%
Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)	13.6%
Autism spectrum disorder	1.9%
Physical disability	6.2%
Chronic illness	10.4%
Mental health / psychological disability	43.3%
Condition not listed	0.6%

In the table below, we note percentages of students in our sample who identified with each student characteristic. The number of students who responded to each question is noted beside the label for that category. Where possible, we provide comparisons with university rates.

**TABLE A2. Student Characteristics**

	Student Sample Percentage	PSU Student Population (Fall 2019) Percentage ( <i>n</i> = 23,362)
<b>Full Time or Part Time Status</b> ( <i>n</i> = 3,511)		
Full time	81.1%	67.6%
Part time	18.9%	32.4%
<b>Type of Degree</b> ( <i>n</i> = 3,511)		
Bachelor's	70.2%	75.6%
Graduate	25.3%	19.2%
Post-Baccalaureate	4.6%	5.1%
<b>Current Class Standing</b> (for undergraduate students only) ( <i>n</i> = 2,412)		
Freshman	11.3%	12.6%
Sophomore	17.7%	15.6%
Junior	34.5%	27.4%
Senior	36.6%	39%
<b>School or Unit Affiliation</b> ( <i>n</i> = 3,511)		
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences	35.7%	31.2%
Maseeh College of Engineering and Computer Science	9.8%	12.9%
School of Social Work	8.5%	5.3%
School of Business	13.2%	16.1%
College of the Arts	7.7%	8.2%
College of Urban and Public Affairs	9.1%	7.8%
College of Education	4.1%	4.5%
School of Public Health	6%	6.1%
Undeclared or Other	6%	7.4%
<b>Class Attendance type</b> ( <i>n</i> = 3,511)		
In-person only	53.8%	N/A
Online only	5.3%	N/A
Both in-person and online	40.8%	N/A

## Appendix B

### Employee Sample Description

Employee participants ranged in age from 21 to 84, with a mean of 43 years, which is similar to the average age of 45 among all PSU employees. In the table below, we note percentages of employees in our sample who identified with each demographic or employee experience category. The number of employees who responded to each demographic or employee experience question is noted beside the label for that category. Where possible, we provide comparisons with university rates.

**TABLE B1. Employee Demographics and Experiences**

	Employee Sample Percentage	PSU Employee Population (Fall 2019) Percentage* (n = 3,590)
<b>Race or Ethnicity (n = 992)</b>		
Asian or Asian American	6.3%	7.8%
Black or African American	2.4%	2.9%
Hispanic or Latino/a/ex	7.1%	6.3%
Middle Eastern or North African	1%	N/A
Native American	1.2%	0.8%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1%	0.3%
Multiracial	3.2%	3.4%
White	82.4%	70%
Prefer not to answer	4.2%	7.8%
Race / ethnicity not listed	0.4%	N/A

**\*Note:** Comparisons between our employee sample and the PSU employee population should be made with caution due to differences in data collection and reporting approaches. PSU records only one racial or ethnic category per employee, whereas employees in our study were asked to select all that apply. Thus, percentages total more than 100.

**TABLE B1. Employee Demographics and Experiences**  
(Continued)

	Employee Sample Percentage	PSU Employee Population (Fall 2019) Percentage* (n = 3,590)
<b>Gender Identity (n = 990)</b>		
Woman	63%	56%
Man	31.7%	42%
Trans Woman	0.3%	
Trans Man	0.4%	
Transgender	0.1%	
Non-binary, including gender fluid and gender non-conforming	1.4%	
Genderqueer	0.5%	
Agender	0.4%	
Questioning or unsure	0.3%	
Prefer not to answer	1.8%	

**\*Note:** Comparisons between our employee sample and the PSU employee population should be made with caution due to differences in data collection and reporting approaches. Campus rates were reported as male or female, while in our study we included additional categories beyond the male/female binary.

**TABLE B1. Employee Demographics and Experiences (Continued)**

	Employee Sample Percentage
<b>Sexual Orientation (n = 988)</b>	
Asexual	2.1%
Bisexual	7.6%
Gay	3.2%
Heterosexual/Straight	70.5%
Lesbian	3.3%
Pansexual	2.3%
Queer	4.7%
Questioning or unsure	0.7%
Same Gender Loving	0.1%
Prefer not to answer	5.4%
<b>Relationship Status (n = 990)</b>	
Single	17%
In a relationship or relationships	15.4%
Married or domestic partnership	61.9%
Divorced	4.2%
Separated	0.8%
Widowed	0.7%
<b>Highest Level of Education (n = 989)</b>	
High school diploma or GED	0.3%
Some college (but not college degree)	6.1%
Associate's degree	1.8%
Bachelor's degree	24.8%
Graduate degree	66.9%



**TABLE B1. Employee Demographics and Experiences (Continued)**
**Employee Sample  
Percentage**

<b>Highest Level of Education Completed by Parents and/or Guardians (n = 986)</b>	
No high school diploma	3.6%
High school diploma or GED	17.1%
Some college (but not college degree)	12.7%
Associate's degree	4%
Bachelor's degree	23%
Graduate degree	39.6%
<b>Housing Situations Over the Past Year (select all that apply) (n = 1,017)</b>	
Staying in rented or owned houses, mobile homes, or apartments, alone or with roommates	51.8%
Staying in rented or owned houses, mobile homes, or apartments with family members	46.4%
Staying in campus or university housing	1.2%
<b>State Currently Living In (n = 3,305)</b>	
Oregon	96.6%
Washington	3.0%
Other	0.4%
<b>Employee Life Experiences (n = 992)</b>	
First generation college student	23.4%
Current or former foster youth	1.5%
Veteran	2.8%
Immigrant to the U.S.	8.2%
Parent of a child under 18 who lives with you	23%
<b>Disabilities or Medical Conditions (n = 992)</b>	
Learning disability	3.6%
Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)	7.3%
Autism spectrum disorder	1.1%
Physical disability	6%
Chronic illness	12.6%
Mental health / Psychological disability	24.4%
Condition not listed	0.2%

In the table below, we note percentages of employees in our sample who identified with each employee characteristic. The number of employees who responded to each question is noted beside the label for that category. Where possible, we provide comparisons with university rates. However, given differences in how some employment variables were collected and recorded, we advise caution when making comparisons.

**TABLE B2. Employee Characteristics**

	Employee Sample Percentage	PSU Employee Population (Fall 2019) Percentage (n = 3,590)
<b>Employment Status (n = 1,017)</b>		
Full time	79.8%	72.6%
Part time	20.2%	27.4%
Average length of employment at PSU	7.92 years	9.3 years
<b>Employee Job Category (n = 1,017)</b>		
Staff	53%	40.4%
Faculty	40.4%	57%
Administrator	9%	2.5%
<b>Staff Classification (only asked to staff respondents) (n = 539)</b>		
Salaried	47.1%	46.8%
Hourly	52.9%	53.2%
<b>Tenure Status (only asked to faculty respondents) (n = 411)</b>		
Tenured	24.1%	21.7%
On tenure track but not tenured	8.3%	6.7%
Not on tenure track	67.6%	71.5%
<b>Academic Rank or Title (only asked to faculty respondents) (n = 411)</b>		
Professor	12.2%	12.5%
Associate Professor	12.9%	10.6%
Assistant Professor	12.4%	15.5%
Professor of Practice	3.6%	2%
Research Professor	4.4%	1.9%
Adjunct Instructor/ Professor	27.7%	21.2%
Instructor/ Senior Instructor	15.1%	23.8%
Research Assistant or Associate	6.1%	6.8%
<b>School or Unit Affiliation (only asked to faculty respondents) (n = 411)</b>		
College of the Arts	10%	10%
College of Education	5.4%	9%
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences	40.6%	30%
College of Urban and Public Affairs	10.9%	6.1%
The Graduate School	1.7%	N/A
Maseeh College of Engineering and Computer Science	5.4%	6.9%
School of Public Health	3.4%	2%
School of Social Work	12.2%	7.4%
School of Business	8.0%	6.9%
University Honors College	1.7%	0.6%

## Appendix C

### COVID Sample Description

Student participants in our COVID follow-up survey ranged in age from 18 to 63, with an average age of 31 years old. The tables below present the percentage of students who identified with each demographic or student characteristic.

**TABLE C1. COVID Survey Student Demographics and Experiences**

COVID Survey Student Sample Percentage ( <i>n</i> = 166)	
<b>Race or Ethnicity</b>	
Asian or Asian American	11.4%
Black or African American	4.2%
Hispanic or Latino/a/x	18.1%
Middle Eastern or North African	2.4%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	2.4%
Multiracial	10.2%
White	68.7%
Race or ethnicity not listed	4.8%
Prefer not to answer	1.2%
<b>Gender Identity</b>	
Woman	57.2%
Man	27.1%
Trans Woman	0.6%
Trans Man	2.4%
Transgender	0.6%
Non-binary, including gender fluid and gender non-conforming	7.2%
Two-spirit	2.4%
Questioning or unsure	1.2%
Identity/identities not listed	0.6%
Prefer not to answer	0.6%

**TABLE C1. COVID Survey Student Demographics and Experiences (Continued)**

		COVID Survey Student Sample Percentage (n = 166)
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>		
Asexual		5.5%
Bisexual		19.5%
Gay		4.3%
Heterosexual/Straight		43.9%
Lesbian		1.2%
Pansexual		7.3%
Queer		7.9%
Questioning or unsure		4.3%
Identity/Identities not listed		3.7%
Prefer not to answer		2.4%
<b>Student Life Experiences</b>		
Transfer student		54.8%
First generation college student		45.2%
Current or former foster youth		4.2%
International student		3.0%
Out-of-state student		9.6%
ESL (English as a Second Language student		4.2%
Veteran		4.2%
Immigrant to the U.S.		4.2%
DACA student		1.2%
Student athlete		1.2%
Parent of a child under 18 who lives with you		16.9%

**TABLE C2.** COVID Survey Student Characteristics

		COVID Survey Student Sample Percentage
<b>Student Status</b> ( <i>n</i> = 166)		
Currently enrolled or will be enrolled in Fall 2020		85%
Graduated in Spring 2020		12%
No longer enrolled and no plans to enroll in Fall 2020		3%
<b>Full Time or Part Time Status</b> (for current students only) ( <i>n</i> = 141)		
Full Time		69.5%
Part Time		30.5%
<b>Type of Degree</b> (for current students only) ( <i>n</i> = 141)		
Bachelor's		70.9%
Graduate		27.6%
Post-Baccalaureate		1.4%