



The state of basic needs security for postsecondary students

WSAC Research Digest #3: Student Supports



*This is the third of the series of **WSAC Research Digests** that highlight interesting data insights and takeaways from WSAC's new [Strategic Action Plan \(SAP\) Dashboard](#). The goal of the series is to communicate and interpret data in a brief and informal manner to surface important education issues in the state. You can also [view it online](#).*

As founder of the [Hope Center](#), Sara Goldrick-Rab [puts it](#), students are humans first, and their basic needs are central conditions for learning. That means that in addition to quality instruction and academic supports, students need help providing for their basic needs like food and housing if we want them to succeed in postsecondary programs and reach graduation.

WSAC and our partners wanted to understand the scope of basic needs insecurity on college campuses in Washington. So, in the fall of 2022, we administered the first ever Washington Student Experience Survey (WSES) to postsecondary students across the state. The survey provided a baseline understanding of the prevalence of basic needs insecurity for the nearly 10,000 Washington students from 39 institutions who responded to the survey. A summary of key results is included in the Student Supports section of the [SAP Dashboard](#).

Survey results revealed that basic needs insecurity is widespread among postsecondary students in the state. Overall, 38 percent of respondents reported experiencing food insecurity and 36 percent reported experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness. **This means more than one in three Washington postsecondary students does not have reliable access to enough affordable food or stable housing, a fact that no doubt impedes their ability to learn and increases their chances of dropping out.**

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When we look at the same data disaggregated by race, another alarming pattern emerges. **More than half of American Indian/Alaska Native students and Black students reported food and housing insecurity on the 2022 survey, considerably higher rates than their peers of other races.**

Addressing inequities in educational outcomes is not just a matter of academics. Doing so also requires close consideration of the non-academic factors that shape students' experiences. Identifying students with greater risk of barriers to success, like basic needs insecurity, can help the state target student-centered supports that improve their experiences and outcomes. Ultimately, by reducing systemic barriers to success, the state can address systemic disparities in our postsecondary education system.

It's also important to continue monitoring the prevalence of basic needs insecurity on campuses, and fortunately, we're not the only ones who think so. Last year, the state passed [legislation](#) that makes it a requirement to conduct a statewide survey of basic needs (like the WSES) biennially. This important work will help communities, institutions, and the state continue to make investments to support students to and through postsecondary education while meeting their needs as humans first.

Start exploring: <https://wsac.wa.gov/sap-dashboard>

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