



#REALCOLLEGE DURING THE PANDEMIC SURVEY RESULTS

Institution Report

July 2020



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INSTITUTION REPORT FOR ESSEX COUNTY COLLEGE

Prepared by
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at Temple University

July 2020

#REALCOLLEGE DURING THE PANDEMIC SURVEY

In March 2020, the coronavirus pandemic struck American higher education. Across the nation, colleges closed campuses, students and staff lost jobs, and emergency resources failed to meet the demands caused by the crisis. To assess the pandemic's impact on students, the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice fielded a multi-institutional survey exploring basic needs security and related challenges.

In order to capture students' experiences during and due to the pandemic, a few adjustments were made to the usual #RealCollege survey. For instance, to assess basic needs insecurity and anxiety level, we used fewer questions or asked students to reflect over a shorter period of time than previous #RealCollege surveys.

Given these key differences, we discourage comparisons to previous reports. For more detail on the research methodology and survey participants, please refer to the web appendices for #RealCollege During the Pandemic Survey (available at www.hope4college.com).

RESPONSES FROM ESSEX COUNTY COLLEGE

Invitations to complete the survey were emailed to approximately 6,910 students from Essex County College and 643 students responded, corresponding to a 9.3% response rate. Overall, more than 38,600 students from 54 institutions in 26 states completed the survey.

The findings below are also compared to overall estimates and the results at peer institutions (e.g., two- or four-year colleges).

RESULTS FOR ESSEX COUNTY COLLEGE

As shown in Table 1, 68% of your students experienced at least one of the following measures of basic needs insecurity:

- 56% were food insecure in the prior 30 days. This percentage is higher than that at peer institutions and higher than the percentage for the overall student sample.
- 44% were housing insecure at the time of the survey. This percentage is higher than that at peer institutions and higher than the percentage for the overall student sample.
- 13% were homeless due to the pandemic. This percentage is higher than that at peer institutions and higher than the percentage for the overall student sample.

Your students faced other challenges besides their basic needs (Table 2). Our survey also revealed that:

- Among students who held at least one job prior to the pandemic, 42% lost their job(s) and 27% saw reduced hours and/or pay.
- 50% are experiencing at least moderate anxiety.

Examples of disruptions to student learning and program completion at your college include:

- 41% could no longer concentrate on their education;
- 31% did not have a functional laptop or a reliable internet connection; and
- 10% had no time for school, with 47% of your students saying they were also taking care of a family member as a result of the pandemic.

Among those experiencing basic needs insecurity, accessing financial supports was uneven. For example,

- 38% applied for unemployment, SNAP, and/or emergency aid at your institution, which is lower than at peer institutions and similar to the percentage for the overall sample.
- However among those who did not apply for any of these financial supports, 65% stated that these supports were either not available to them or they considered themselves ineligible. This estimate is lower than that at peer institutions and lower than the percentage for the overall sample.
- 45% of your students said they did not know about such supports, which is higher than at peer institutions and higher than the percentage for the overall sample.
- Lastly, 27% of your students did not know how to apply. This percentage is lower than that at peer institutions and lower than the percentage for the overall sample.

Table 1. Percentage of Students with Basic Needs Insecurity During the Pandemic

	Essex County College	Peer institutions	Overall
Types of basic needs insecurity			
Any basic needs insecurity	68	58	58
Food insecurity	56	44	42
Housing insecurity	44	36	37
Homelessness	13	11	12

Source: 2020 #RealCollege During the Pandemic Survey

Notes: Some measures were changed from previous #RealCollege surveys and are not directly comparable. Results from any category with fewer than 10 respondents are not shown in the table.

Table 2. Percentage of Students Who Faced Other Challenges During the Pandemic

	Essex County College	Peer institutions	Overall
Job status among pre-pandemic job holders			
Lost job	42	33	35
Reduction in hours or pay	27	32	31
Mental health			
At least moderate anxiety	50	49	50
Academic challenges			
Cannot concentrate	41	50	53
Non-functional laptop or reliable internet	31	20	20
No time for school	10	14	15
Taking care of family	47	41	40
Accessing financial supports among students who are basic needs insecure			
Applied for financial supports	38	40	38
Not available or ineligible for supports	65	70	72
Did not know about supports	45	38	37
Did not know how to apply for supports	27	28	28

Source: 2020 #RealCollege During the Pandemic Survey

Notes: Some measures were changed from previous #RealCollege surveys and are not directly comparable. Results from any category with fewer than 10 respondents are not shown in the table.

CONCLUSION

The #RealCollege During the Pandemic Survey offered a glimpse into how Essex County College students dealt with the sudden and unexpected impact of the pandemic. The results from the survey confirm what students nationwide have been telling their institutions over the past several months--their health and well-being have been adversely affected by the coronavirus pandemic. Our survey revealed that:

- Nearly three in five students experienced basic needs insecurity during the pandemic, so it is understandable that at least half of them also said they had difficulty concentrating on coursework.
- A majority of students who were working prior to the pandemic experienced reduced hours or pay or, worse, lost at least one of their jobs.
- Even among students who were basic needs insecure, there was low utilization of available financial supports, especially unemployment and SNAP.
- And although not reported above, there are stark racial/ethnic disparities that, if not remedied, will further drive inequities in college attainment.

JOIN THE #REALCOLLEGE MOVEMENT

Colleges and universities that wish to obtain up-to-date information on how their students are affected by the pandemic may register for the fall 2020 #RealCollege survey online until July 17, 2020.

For more information, visit www.hope4college.com/realcollege-survey-2020/.

ABOUT US

The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice is redefining what it means to be a student-ready college with a national movement centered on #RealCollege students' basic needs.

In order to advance the necessary systemic changes to support those needs, our work includes four pillars: action research, engagement and communication, advocacy, and sustainability.