
California State University Food and Housing Security Survey: Emerging Patterns from the Humboldt State University Data

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The Problem

College students with food insecurity may find it more challenging to achieve academic success and wellbeing. Limited empirical evidence exists about the relationship between college student food insecurity, health and academic performance. On average the California State University (CSU) system graduates approximately 50% of undergraduate students in 6 years (The California State University, n.d.). Data from pilot studies (Maguire & O'Neill, 2015) and anecdotally across the CSU system demonstrate that students are experiencing food and housing insecurity and that this may influence retention, academic performance and graduation. Examining these variables in the CSU system will help the system have more information about where to focus efforts.

The Purpose

We conducted a survey aimed at providing a snapshot of the current level of food and housing security, as well as other factors relating to student success. Although research on this topic is growing, few empirical studies examine the level of college student food and housing security in the U.S. and worldwide.

The Methods

The researchers will send an online survey to all students at participating CSUs. We have completed a survey on the Humboldt State University campus and 1,554 students participated. So far, 12 other campuses have expressed interest. We are partnering with another researcher to conduct focus groups with students recruited from the food and housing survey. Food security was measured using the U.S. Household Food Security Survey Module: Six-Item Short Form Economic Research Service, USDA in which the researchers adapted for student households.

The California State University. (n.d.). Six Year Graduation and Persistence rates.
<http://asd.calstate.edu/gradrates/ftf.shtml>

Maguire, J. & O'Neill, M, (2015). *College Student Self-Reported Food Insecurity and Impact on Health and Academic Performance*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

Key Definitions for food security

The USDA's labels to describe ranges of food security were used to define food security for this study. Definitions provided by the USDA Economic Research Services (2015) state:

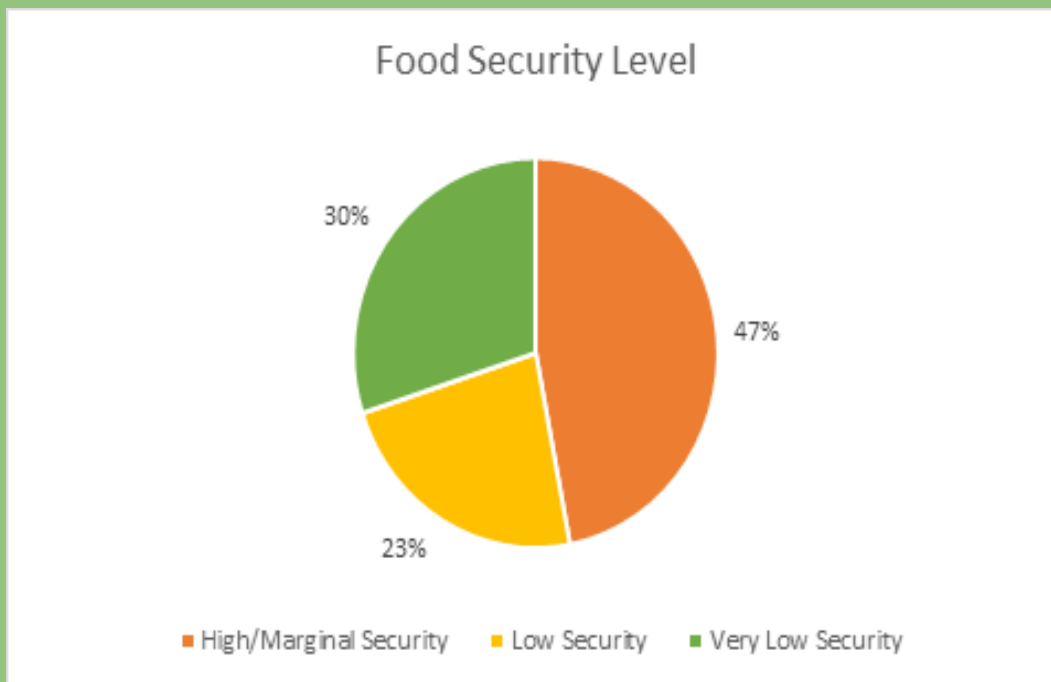
- High food security: no reported indications of food-access problems or limitations.
- Marginal food security: one or two reported indications—typically of anxiety over food sufficiency or shortage of food in the house. Little or no indication of changes in diets or food intake.
- Low food security: reports of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet. Little or no indication of reduced food intake.
- Very low food security: Reports of multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.

United States Department of Agriculture, (2015). Definitions of food security, Food and Nutrition Service, Economic Research Services. Retrieved from <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security.aspx>

Findings

Humboldt State University (HSU) Student Food Insecurity

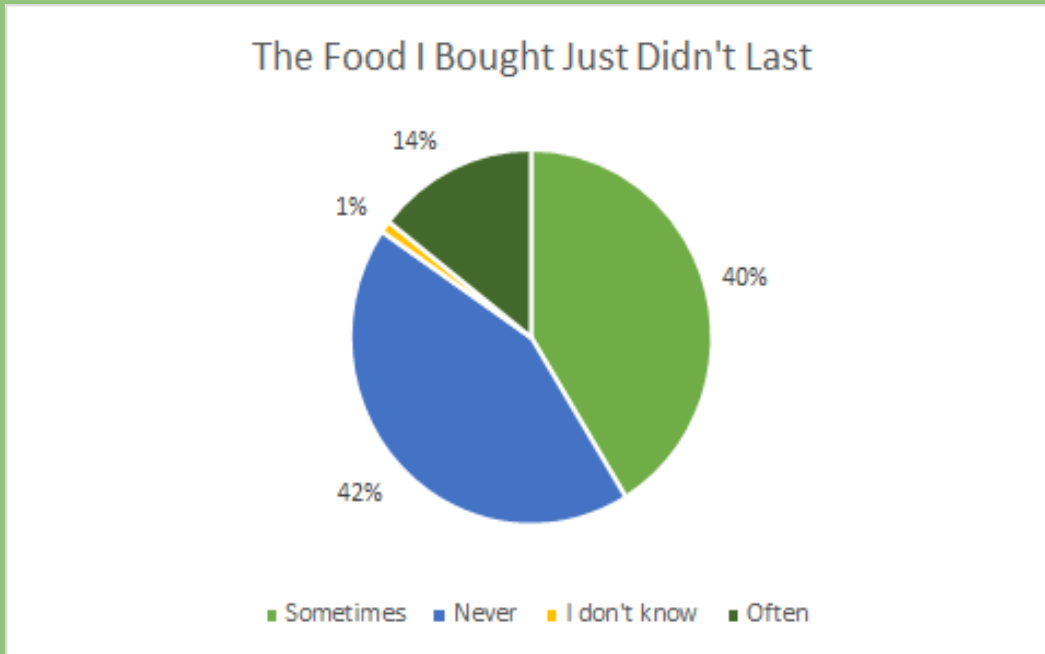
Food security is an issue in the HSU student population; 53% of students who took the survey reported experiencing low or very low food security. Slightly less than half (47%) had high/marginal food security. In the US only 14% of households are considered to be food insecure (Coleman-Jensen, Rabbitt, Gregory, & Singh, 2015). However, HSU students have considerably higher food insecurity.



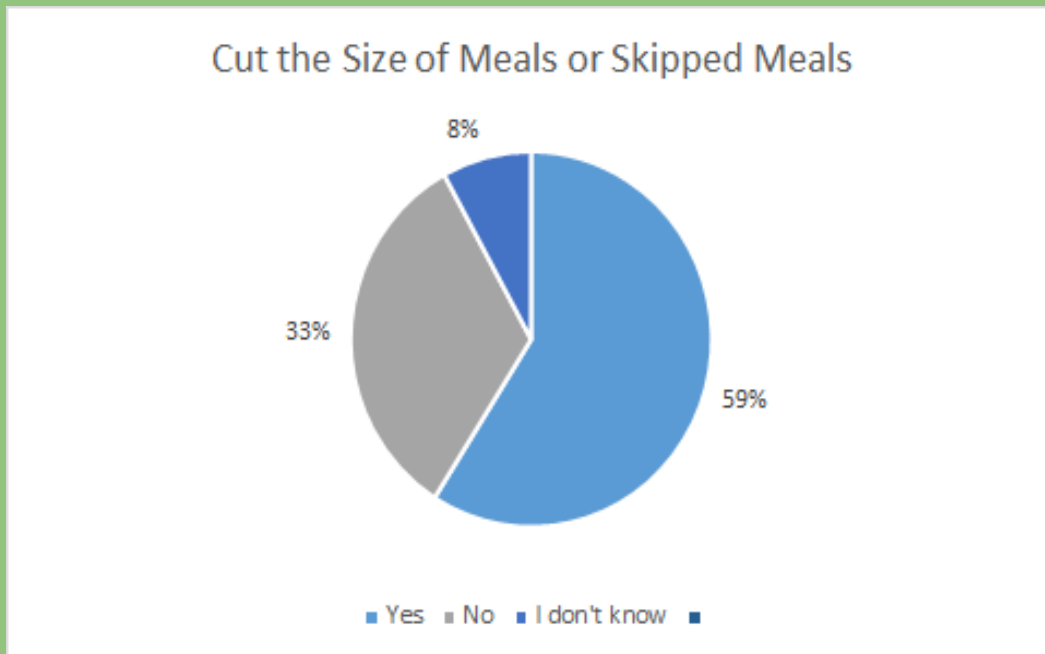
Coleman-Jensen, A., Rabbitt, M.P., Gregory, C., & Singh, A. (2015). Household food security in the United States in 2014. United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service Report 194. Retrieved from <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err-economic-research-report/err194.aspx>

Note: Chi-square test found no statistically significant difference between households that share meals and those that do not. Charts represent full sample.

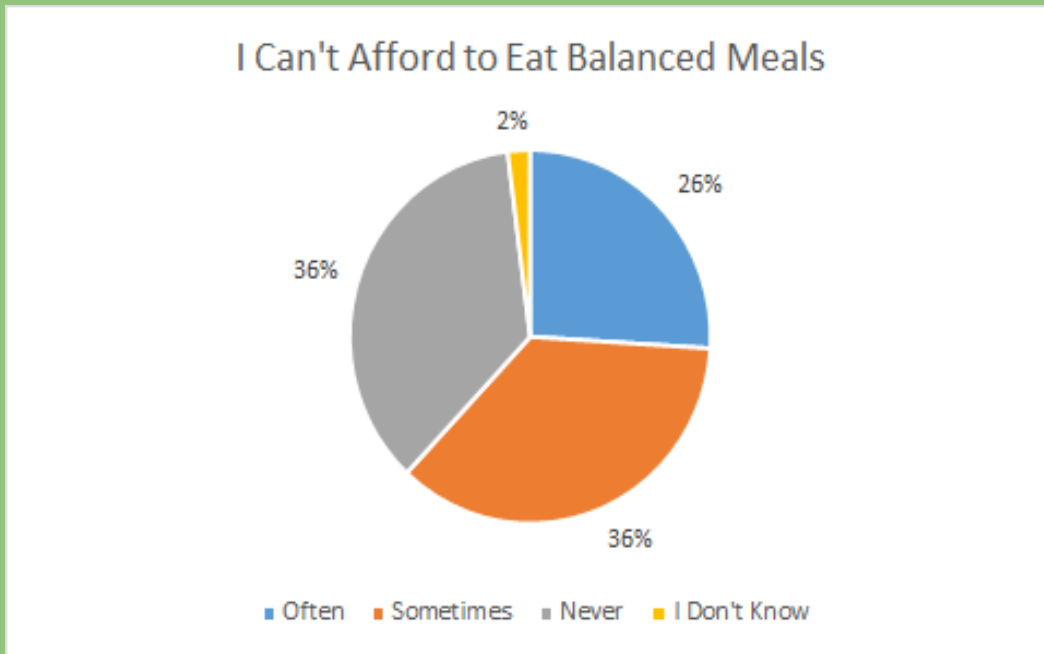
40% of students reported in the last 30 days, “The food that I bought just didn’t last, and I didn’t have money to get more”.



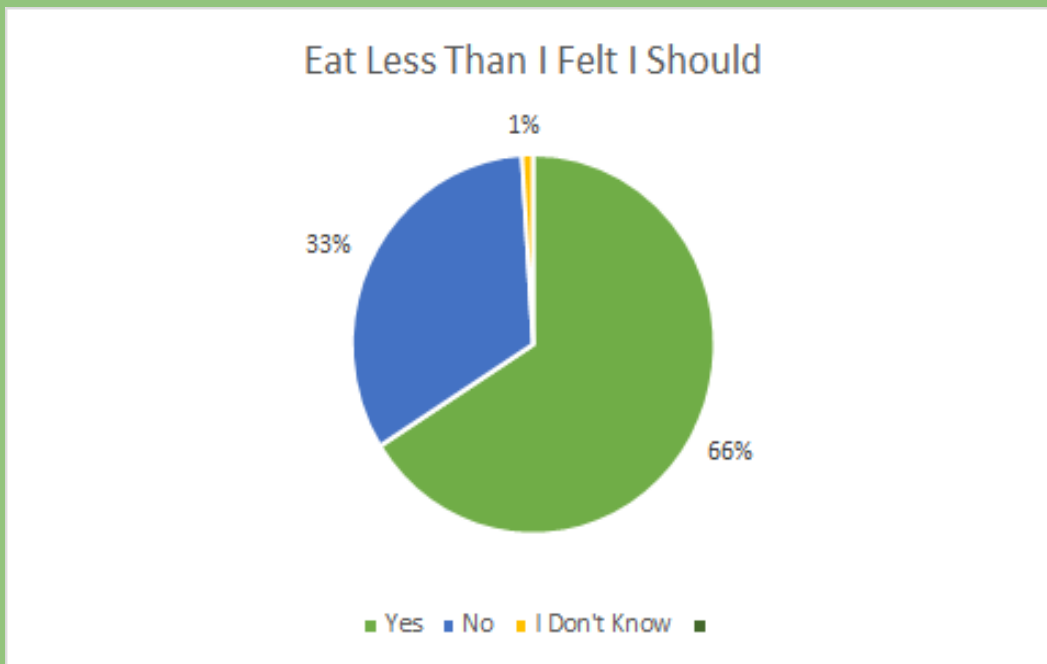
59% of students reported skipping meals or reducing the size of their meals.



62% of students reported not having enough money to purchase balanced meals.

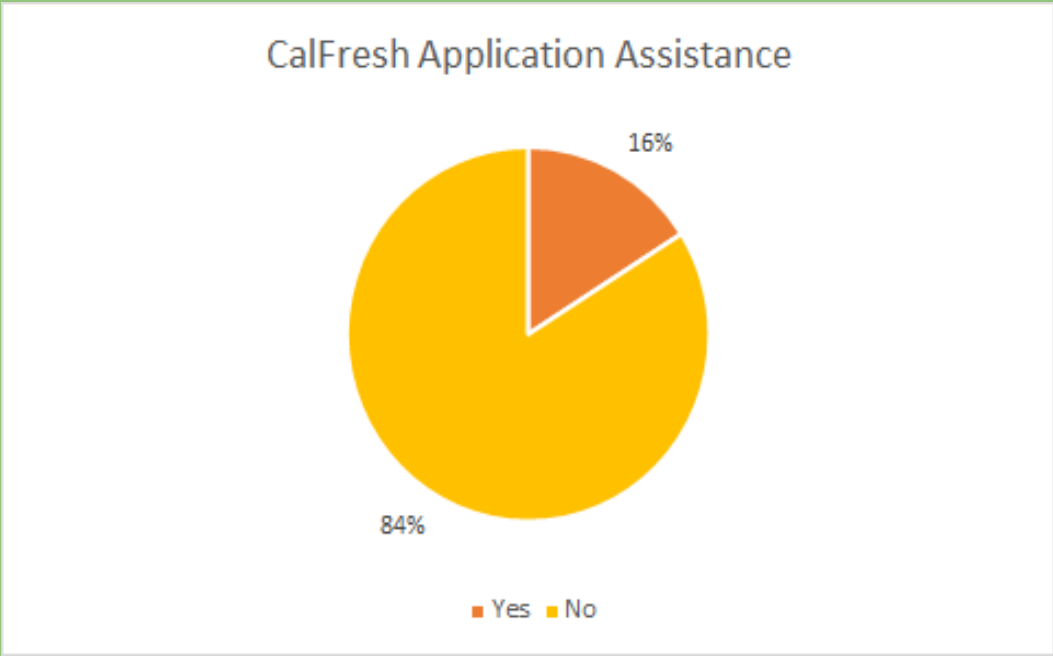


66% of students reported eating less food than they felt they should.

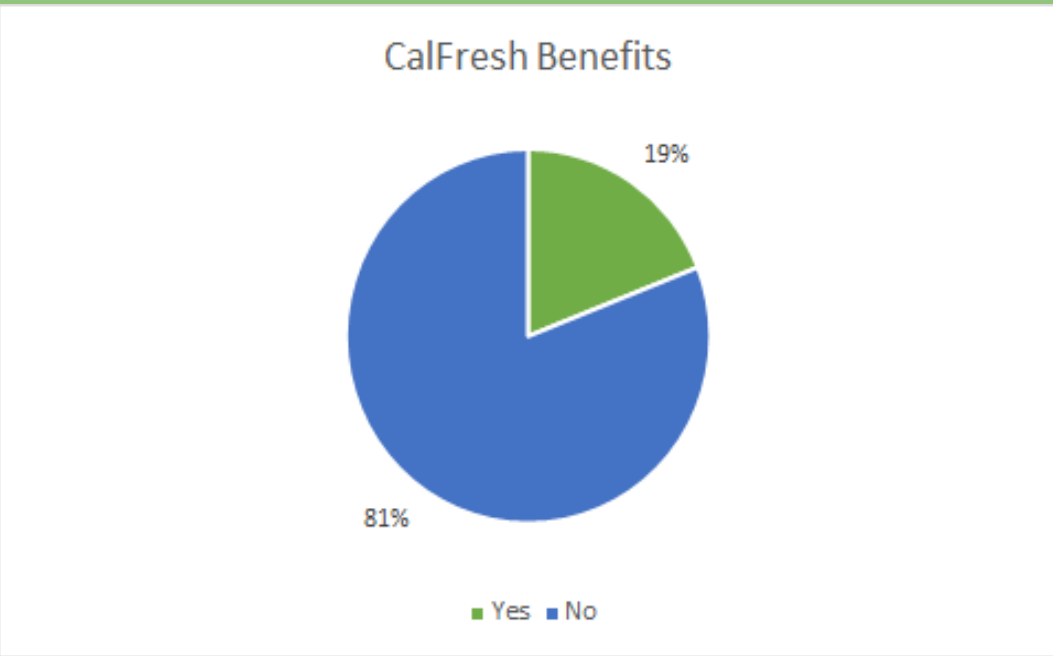


HSU Student Emergency Food Resource Use

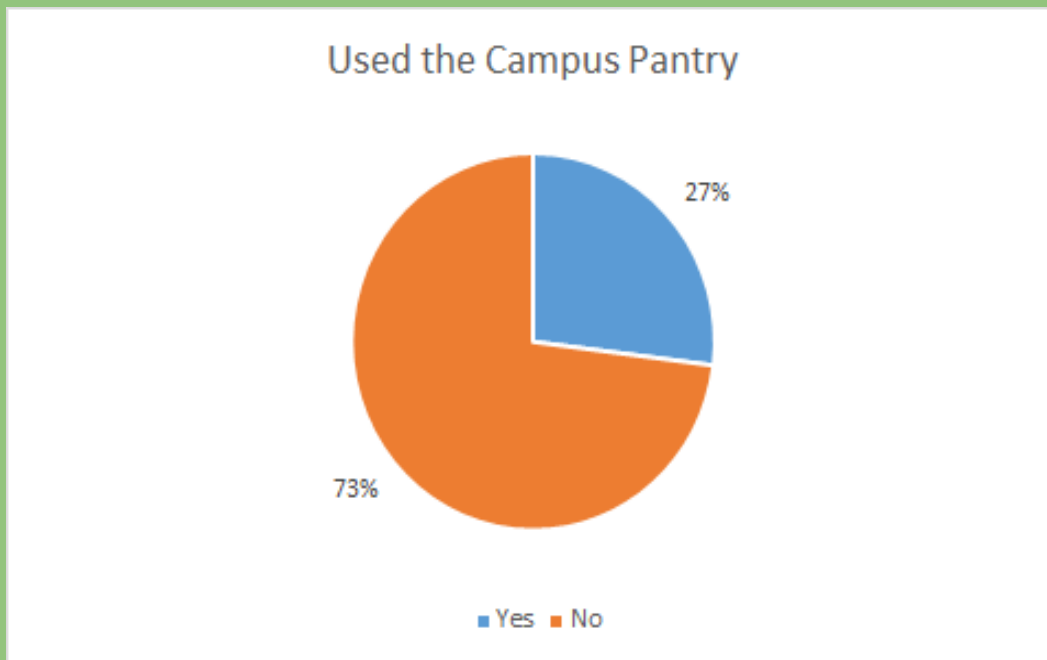
16% of students received CalFresh application assistance on campus.



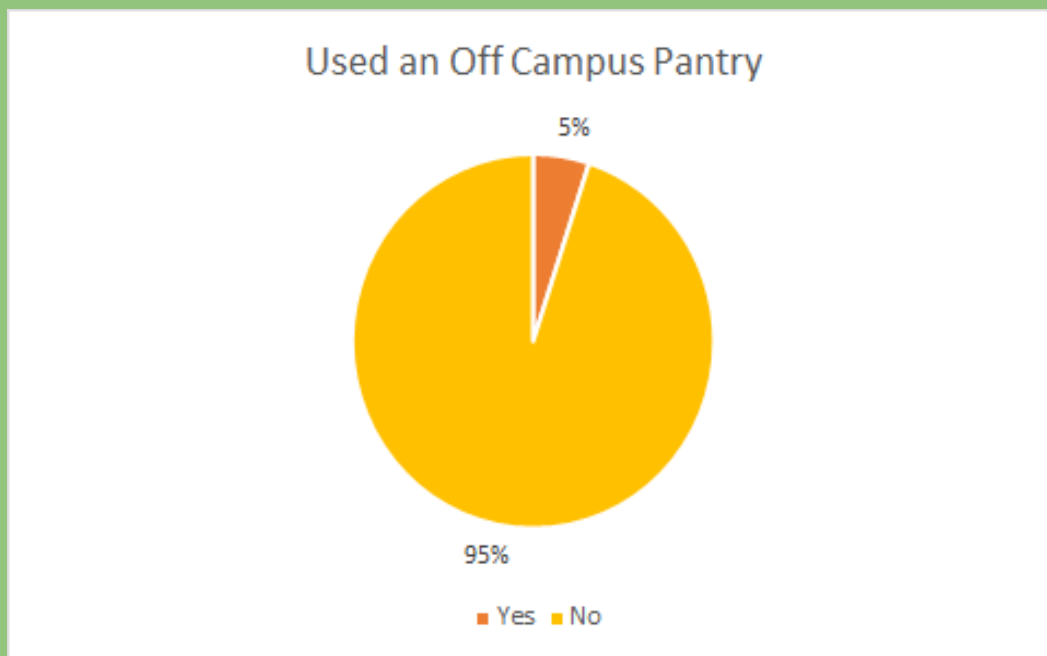
19% of students receive CalFresh benefits, (food stamps).



27% of students used the campus food pantry.

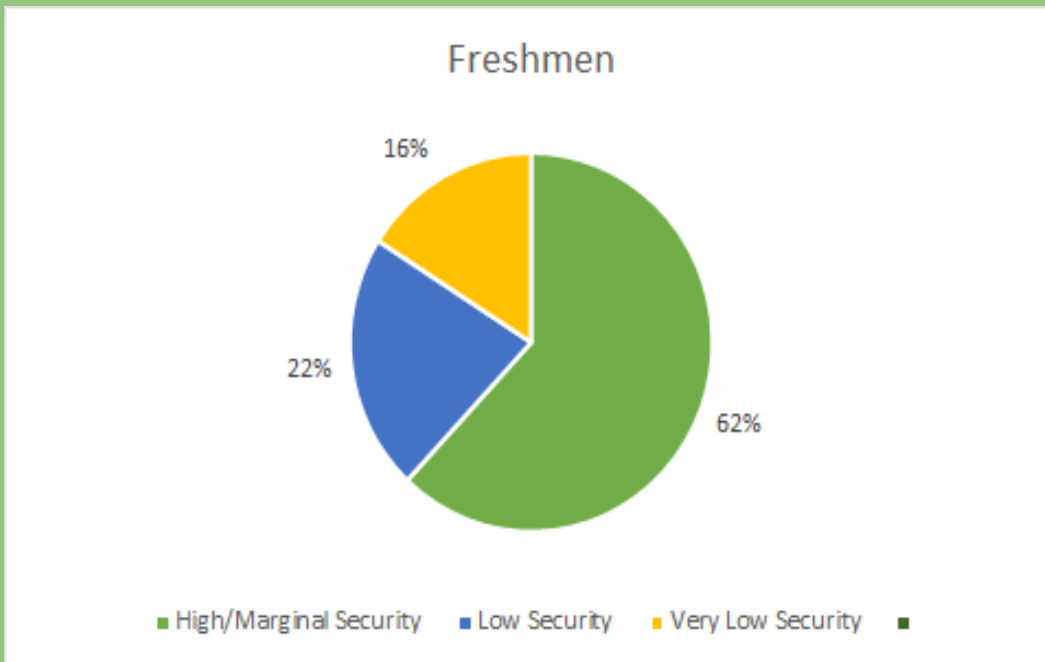


5% of students used off-campus food pantry.

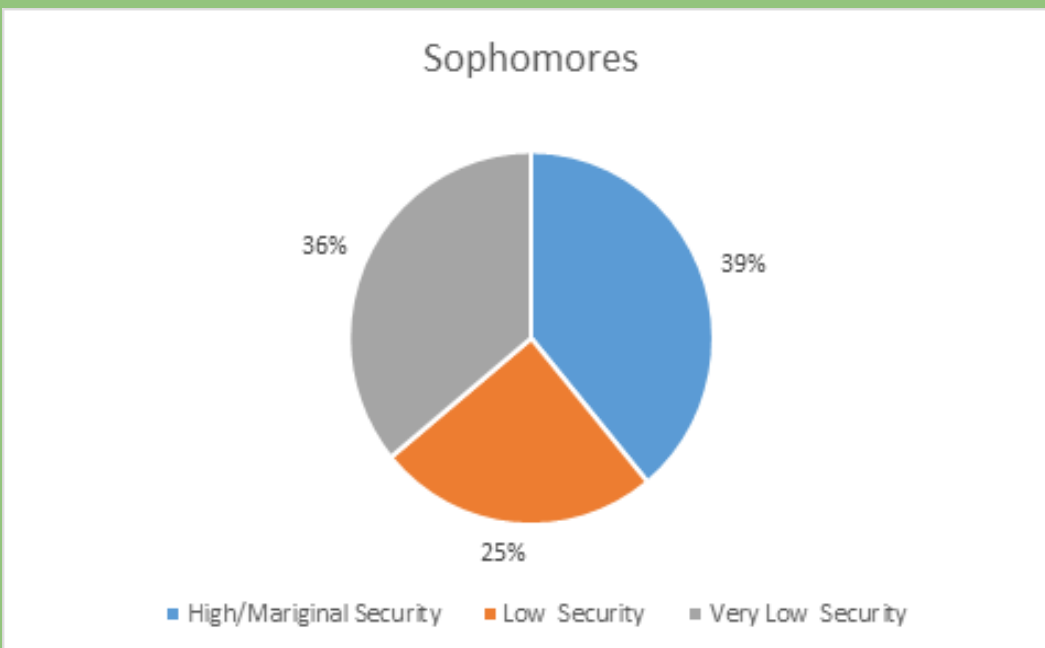


Class Standing

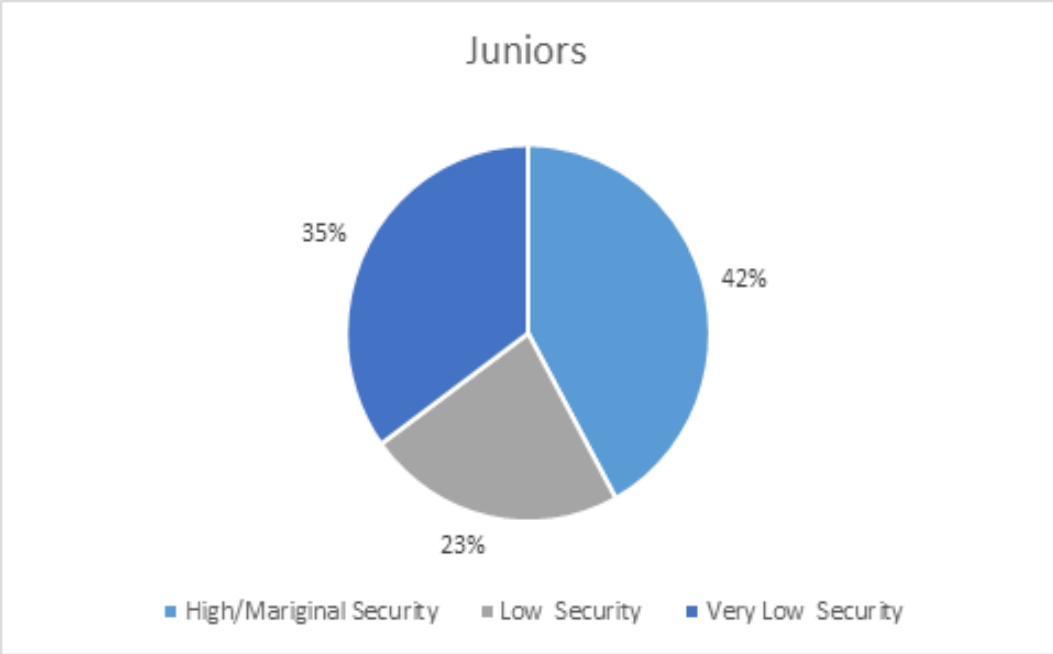
Class standing was associated with food insecurity. Freshmen were more likely than sophomores, juniors or seniors to be in the high/marginal food security category (62%). 38% had low or very low food security.



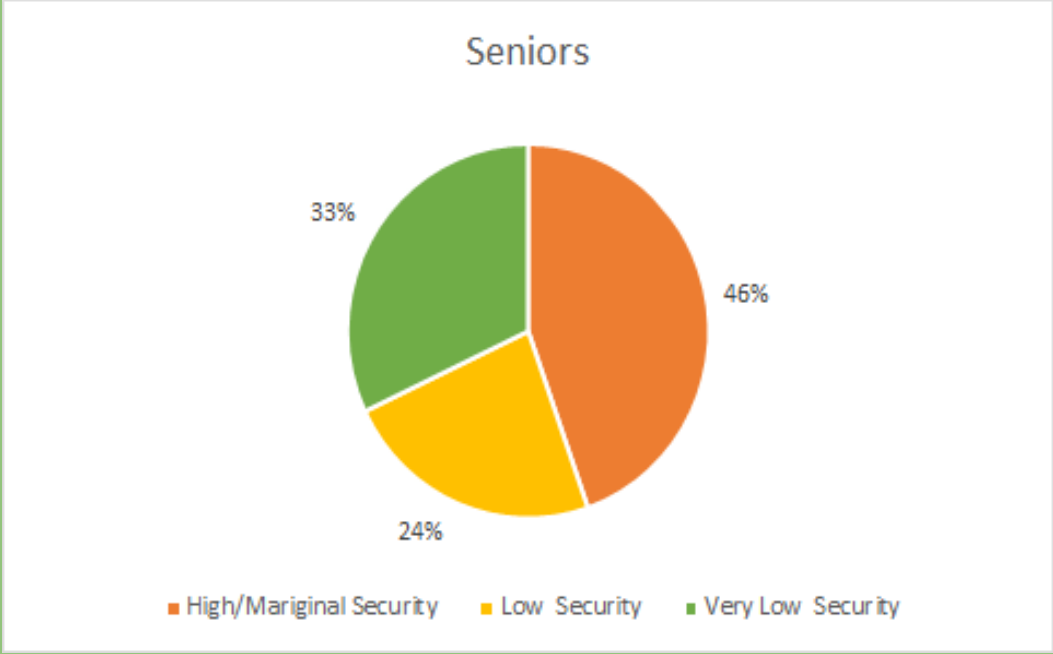
Only 39% of sophomores had high/marginal food security and 61% had low or very low food security.



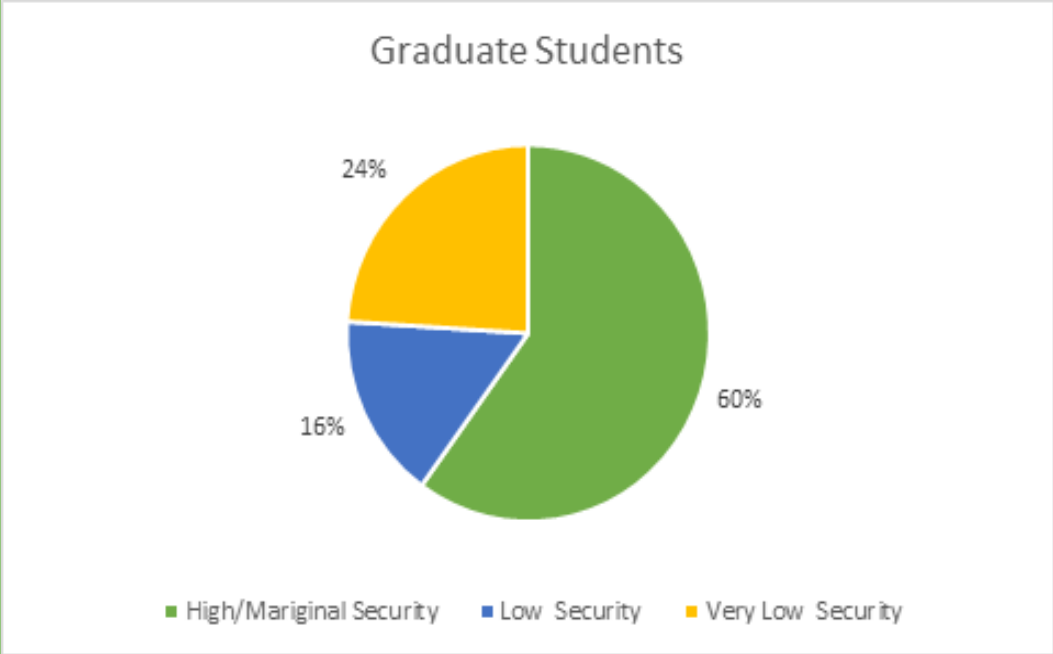
Juniors and sophomores had similar food security levels. 42% had high/marginal food security and 58% had low or very low food security.



Seniors had slightly more food security than sophomores and juniors. 46% had high/marginal food security and 57% had low or very low food security.

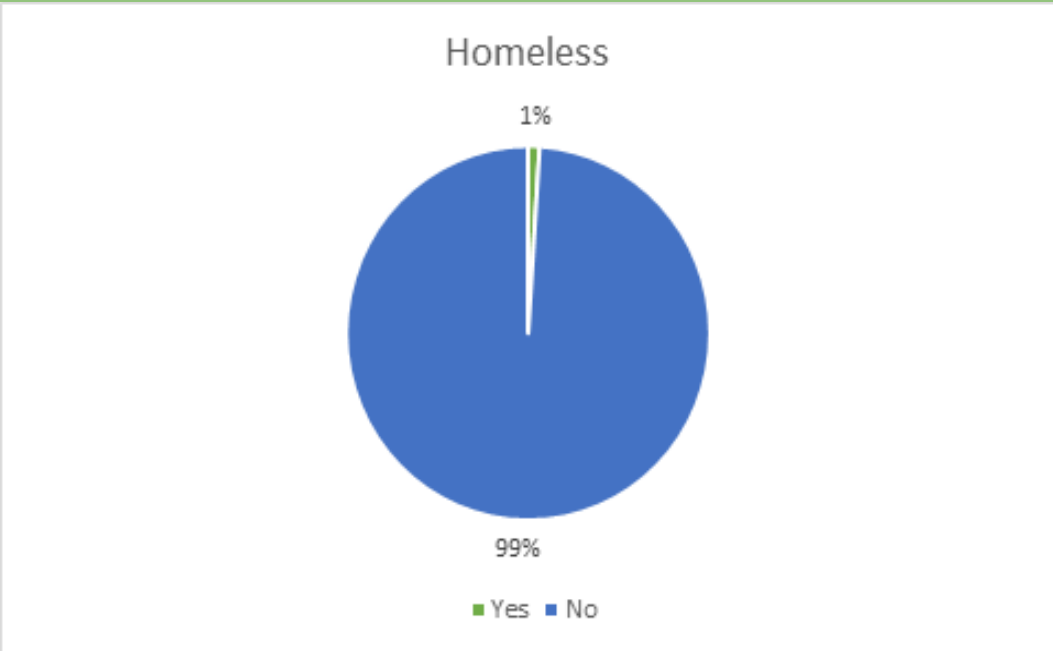


Graduate students, like freshmen, were more likely to have high/marginal food security. 60% had high/marginal food security and 40% had low or very low food security.

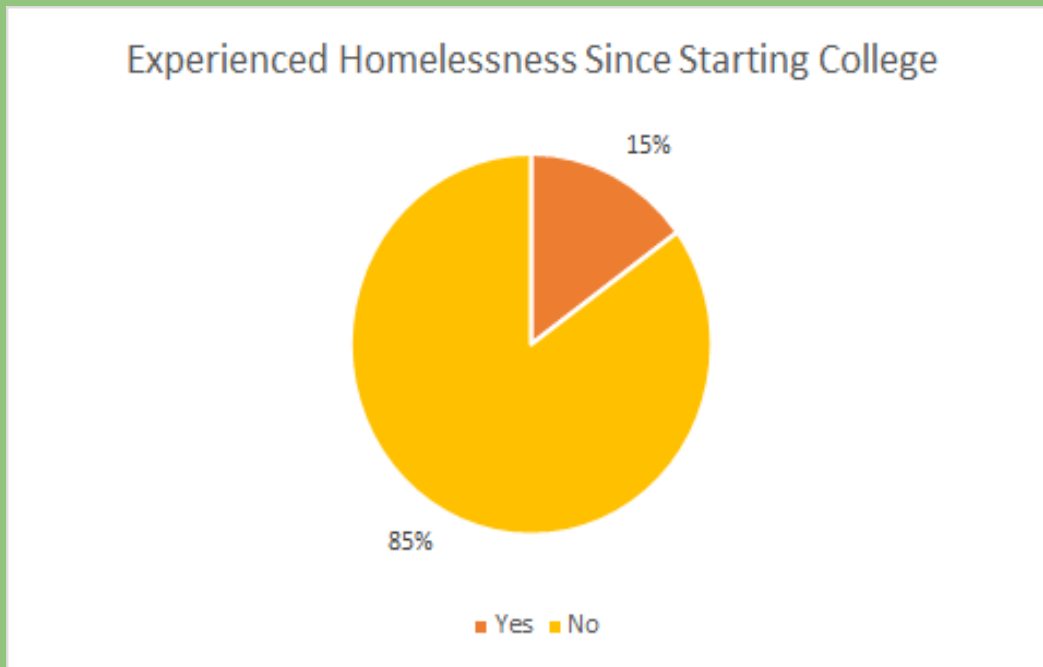


HSU Student Housing Insecurity

1%, or 21 students, reported that they were currently homeless.



15%, or 225 students, reported experiencing homelessness at some point since starting college.



Implications

Further research is required to determine the scope of food insecurity and displaced students in the CSU system beyond HSU to understand how students describe their experiences and how these factors may impact retention, academic performance and graduation rates. We will complete this in the following year. Research needs to reflect regional differences to evaluate those services being developed.

To learn more about how to best serve students on campuses, and fit the needs of each region, pilot studies using and/or pursuing evidence-based practices are needed.

State and federal policies that serve people with food and housing insecurity need to be redesigned to be more inclusive for college students. Examples of this would be to make it easier for college students to meet eligibility criteria for public social service programs (e.g. the Federal Supplemental Nutrition Program), and to standardize qualifications for social services with financial aid packages.