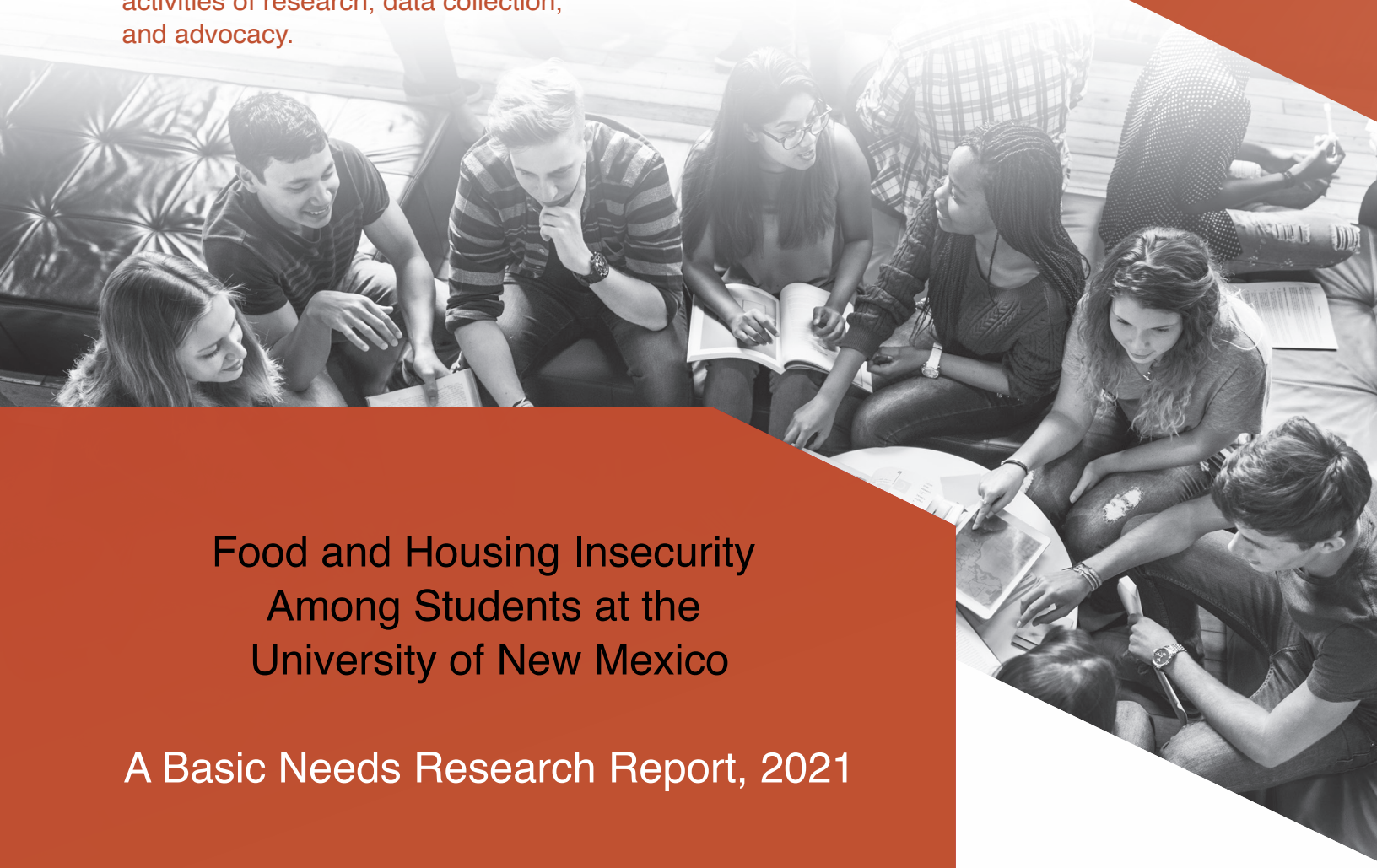
GOAL

Improve the food and housing security of students at the University of New Mexico through the combined activities of research, data collection, and advocacy.



Food and Housing Insecurity Among Students at the University of New Mexico

A Basic Needs Research Report, 2021

UNM Basics Needs Project

Report prepared by Drs. Sarita Cargas, Marygold Walsh-Dilley, Heather Mechler, and Kathryn Coakley

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Introduction

The UNM Basic Needs Study was initiated in 2020 to examine the prevalence and patterns of food and housing insecurity among students at the University of New Mexico. "Basic needs" is a term used by the International Labor Organization to indicate the minimum necessary resources needed for long term physical wellbeing. There are many basic needs that students have – food, shelter, clothing, healthcare, etc. – but here we focus specifically on food and housing security. Both are itemized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art 25, which has been recognized by all United Nations member nations including the US. Food insecurity is "the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or the ability to acquire those foods in a socially acceptable manner" (U.S. Department of Agriculture). Similarly, housing insecurity is the limited or uncertain availability of and access to stable, safe, adequate and affordable housing, or the inability to acquire that housing in a socially acceptable way (see Cox et al. 2017, 7). Food and housing insecurities vary in severity; while hunger and homelessness are the most severe forms of food and housing insecurity, students can also experience food or housing insecurity without being hungry or homeless.

FOOD INSECURITY IS

the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or the ability to acquire those foods in a socially acceptable manner.

(Goldrick-Rab et al. 2018, 4)

Food insecurity is measured by the US Department of Agriculture (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2021). The USDA defines four categories of food security: high, marginal, low, and very low food security. Households and individuals with low and very low food security are considered food insecure. Very low food security indicates some degree of eating disruption, such as skipping meals, not getting enough to eat on a regular basis, or going a full day or more without eating. Low food security – which is still classified as food insecure – might not mean caloric deprivation or hunger, but it can include food choices that rely on a limited variety of basic foods, substitution towards cheaper and less nutritious foods, or eating a limited diet that does not provide complete nutrition. It can also mean that a person experiences significant uncertainty about their access to food, and is generally accompanied by stress, worry, or anxiety about where food will come from.

Housing insecurity similarly exists along a range. Homelessness is the lack of "fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence" (see the McKinney-Vento Homelessness Assistance Act 1987, section VII-B), but individuals can experience housing insecurity in myriad ways without experiencing homelessness. Some individuals experience housing insecurity when they are behind on rent, have been evicted from their home, or are threatened with eviction. Housing insecurity includes the inability or uncertainty of ability to pay all or some housing-related bills like utilities, or the loss of some utilities like heat, electricity, or internet. Other elements of housing insecurity include residing with others beyond

HOUSING INSECURITY IS

the limited or uncertain availability of and access to stable, safe, adequate and affordable housing, or the inability to acquire that housing in a socially acceptable way.

(Cox et al. 2017, 7)

the intended capacity of the home, temporarily moving in with others to avoid homelessness, or the need to move frequently. Like food insecurity, housing insecurity is generally accompanied by significant experiences of stress, worry, and anxiety and individuals experiencing housing insecurity may make trade-offs like giving up food or needed healthcare in their effort to secure housing.

This report presents the results of our second annual Basic Needs Survey, enumerated on UNM campuses across the state in April 2021. This survey measured the prevalence of food and housing insecurity among UNM students, as was done in our initial basic needs survey in spring 2020 (see Cargas et al. 2020). In 2021, the survey included additional questions about physical and mental wellbeing and the Lobo Food Pantry, and was administered to students at branch UNM campuses in addition to main campus.

In 2021, the Basic Needs Survey had 833 respondents. The prevalence of food insecurity among survey respondents was 26%, a decrease from the prevalence measured in 2020, which was 31.7%. Housing insecurity increased slightly from 2020 to 2021: we found that 43.5% of participants experienced housing insecurity in the 2021 survey, compared to 41.4% in 2020. African American, Native American, Hispanic, International and LGBTQ+ student respondents experience higher than the UNM student average for food and/or housing insecurity.

Graduate and Professional Students

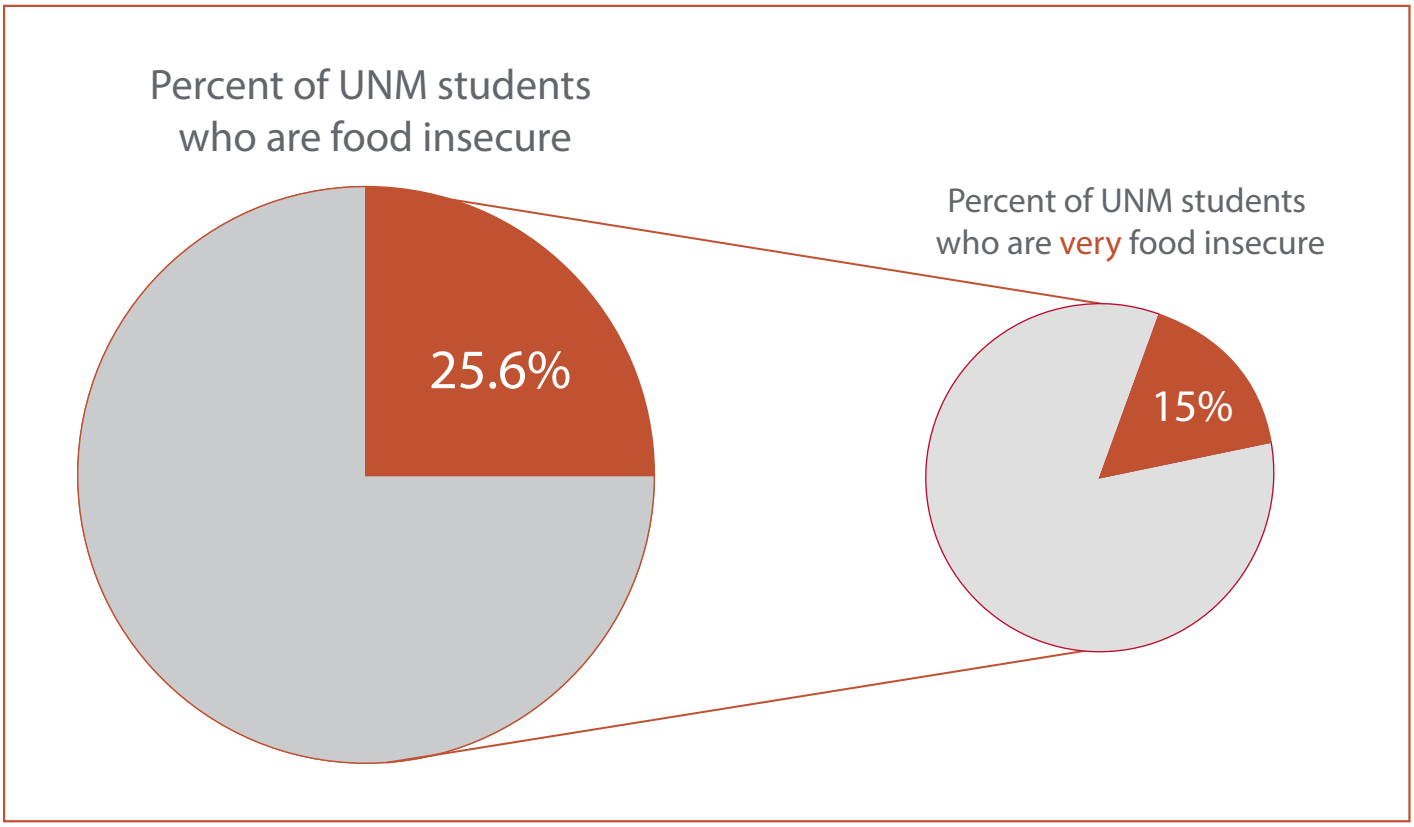
There is currently a dearth of research on the graduate and professional student experience of basic needs insecurity. However, we had a sizable sample, N = 279, and found that 21.2% of these students were food insecure and 37.3% were housing insecure. Nearly 72% of the food insecure and 61% of the housing insecure graduate/professional students were non-white and/or international students. We established that the risk factors associated with undergraduate basic needs insecurity are similar for postgraduates.

> “When you factor in the rent that I have to pay and any bills, tuition, and that sort of thing, it leaves you with very little left at the end of the month for your food.”
>
> (Graduate student comment about getting by on a graduate assistantship.)

Food Insecurity Among UNM Students

In April 2021, over a quarter of students in our sample were food insecure in the 30 days prior to taking the survey. 15.6% of students in our sample experienced marginal food security, meaning that while they were not classified as food insecure, they did experience some concern accessing food. Of the food insecure, 10% had low food security, and 15% had very low food security, meaning they experienced a disruption of eating patterns or a reduction in food intake because they could not afford to purchase enough food.

The lower prevalence of food insecurity found in spring 2021 compared to spring 2020 comes as somewhat of a surprise, a full year into the global pandemic. This may be in line with food security trends among the population at large. The COVID-19 pandemic seems to have led to an initial and relatively dramatic increase in food insecurity, but then a decrease in food insecurity through 2021. According to the Coronavirus Household Pulse Survey (HPS), which was deployed quickly during the initial stage of the pandemic, household food insufficiency rose from 9.5% in April 2020 to 13.4% in December 2020, but declined again to 8.0% by April 2021 (see Coleman-Jensen et al. 2021, page 15). The USDA reports that the number of food insecure individuals rose from 10.9% in 2019 to 11.8% in 2020, and the increase was especially notable for children, with a rise in food insecurity from 14.6 to 16.1% (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2021, Tables 1A and 1B). Nonetheless, the overall household prevalence of food insecurity remained steady between 2019 and 2020, at 10.5% (ibid).



USDA Food Security Definitions

High Food Security: Access at all times for an active healthy life.

Marginal Food Security: May have 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: Food intake was reduced and eating patterns disrupted because of insufficient money and other resources for food. (Includes more incidents of not being able to eat when hungry.)

Student Status

A higher percentage of undergraduates and those pursing an associate degree were food insecure than graduate/professional students, as 29.1% of undergraduates reported being food insecure, 26.3% of associate's degree seekers, and 19.0% of graduate/professional students were food insecure.

> "I financed everything. I paid for my rent and food and everything. But as a freshman trying to work and do all of that, I mean, it was stressful. I never had time for myself. When I'd come back to school, I was burnt out and it was tough to make it. But then also if you can't eat, yeah, your brain is just not there. There's a point where you are just like why I am doing this?"

Table 1. Food Security Status by Student Type

	Full sample (n=833)		Associates (n=55)		Undergraduates (n=499)		Graduate/Prof Students (n=279)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Food secure	**620**	**74.4**	**40**	**72.7**	**354**	**70.9**	**226**	**81.0**
High food security	490	58.8	31	56.4	288	57.7	171	61.3
Marginal food security	130	15.6	9	16.36	66	13.2	55	19.7
Food insecure	**213**	**25.6**	**15**	**27.3**	**145**	**29.1**	**53**	**19.0**
Low food security	88	10.6	5	9.1	64	12.8	19	6.8
Very low food security	125	15.0	10	18.2	81	16.2	34	12.2

Race/Ethnicity

Race and ethnicity data were drawn from institutional data reflecting the race/ethnicity that students reported in their application to UNM. Minority students experience the most food insecurity: two racial/ethnic groups with the highest prevalence of food insecurity were American Indian (49.1%) and African American or Black (46.2%). Food insecurity prevalence was higher among Hispanic and international students than the UNM average.

Table 2. Food Security Status by Race/Ethnicity (n=833)				
	Food Secure		Food Insecure	
	n	%	n	%
White	252	81.3	58	18.7
Hispanic	239	71.8	94	28.2
Asian	32	82.1	7	18.0
African American or Black	7	53.9	6	46.2
American Indian	29	50.9	28	49.1
Two or more races	16	76.2	5	23.8
International	33	73.3	12	26.7

Gender

Table 3 shows that cis-gender female students in our sample had a higher prevalence of food insecurity than cisgender male students. The highest prevalence of food insecurity was within the non-cisgender category (28.1% food insecure), however, which is a combined category that includes students who self-identified as transgender, gender fluid, or self-reported a different gender via a write in option. These three groups were combined because the small sample size left some categories with fewer than five respondents. The prevalence of food insecurity was especially high among transgender and gender fluid students. More research needs to be done to better capture patterns of food insecurity among non-cisgender individuals.

Table 3. Food Security Status by Gender Identity (n=815)				
	Food Secure		Food Insecure	
	n	%	n	%
Female	389	72.7	146	27.3
Male	193	78.5	53	21.5
Non-cisgender (combined category)	23	71.9	9	28.1

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation was collected through self-report in the survey. Respondents could choose from pre-determined sexual orientation categories (heterosexual/straight, gay or lesbian, bisexual, not sure) or elect to write in a sexual orientation not listed. These last students are listed as "other" in the table.

The prevalence of food insecurity among students who reported as heterosexual/straight was 22.7%, which is lower than the UNM average. Gay and lesbian respondents actually had the lowest prevalence of food insecurity among all sexuality categories. Respondents who self-reported other sexualities beyond heterosexual/straight and gay/lesbian, including bisexual, those reporting that they were not sure of their sexual orientation, and those who wrote in a different sexuality not listed, had a prevalence of food insecurity above the UNM average. Bisexual students and students who were not sure of their sexuality had a particularly high prevalence of food insecurity (38.3% and 50%, respectively).

Table 4. Food Security Status by Sexual Orientation

	Food Secure		Food Insecure	
	n	%	n	%
Straight	466	77.3	137	22.7
Gay or lesbian	35	79.6	9	20.5
Bisexual	71	61.7	44	38.3
Not sure	10	50.0	10	50.0
Other	21	72.4	8	27.6

Employment Status

Students who were not employed but looking for work experienced the highest prevalence of food insecurity among employment status (38.3%), although students who were not allowed to work by their program of study also experienced a high degree of food insecurity (27.9%). Students who were employed had slightly lower than average food insecurity. Students who were not employed and not looking for work had the lowest prevalence of food insecurity, likely because they had other, secure sources of financial support.

> "You know there are times … where it's like you get offered another shift and you have a bunch of homework that needs to be done. But with that extra shift, you know that it can help you. And so, you are super tempted to take it or you do take it and then that impacts the amount of sleep that people get and also obviously, their academic success which becomes super overwhelming very quickly."

Table 5. Food Security Status by Employment Status

	Food Secure		Food Insecure	
	n	%	n	%
Employed	402	75.9	128	24.1
Not employed, looking for work	79	61.7	49	38.3
Not employed, not looking for work	101	82.8	21	17.2
Not allowed to work	31	72.1	12	27.9

Dependents

One in five respondents in our sample reported being responsible for either child or adult dependents. The majority of these were parents with one or more child dependent (16.6%), although 6.9% also had adult dependents. The results suggest that student parents who were not also responsible for adult dependents actually had lower than average food insecurity (23.9%). This finding may be related to pandemic resources made available to households with children described above. Those students who were responsible for adult dependents, however, had higher than average food insecurity.

> "Not knowing how I was going to pay for food… looking at my budget and it was just not adding up. I just didn't have any food in my fridge and I didn't know what I was going to do. … I had never been that food insecure and the stress of…it's not just stress, it's like panic. I don't know where I'm going to live after these three months. I hope this job works out. I don't have money for food. Like yeah, panic. Being able to focus on school and being able to focus on my kids and be emotionally and mentally present for them was, in my experience… I mean, it was very difficult."

Table 6. Food Security Status by Dependent Status

	Food Secure		Food Insecure	
	n	%	n	%
No dependents	494	74.7	167	25.3
One or more child dependents	89	76.1	28	23.9
One or more adult dependents	24	66.7	12	33.3
Child and adult dependents	13	68.4	6	31.6

Housing Insecurity & Homelessness Results

In this study, we define housing insecurity as the limited or uncertain availability of and access to stable, safe, adequate and affordable housing, or the inability to acquire that housing in a socially acceptable way. We draw on the McKinney-Vento Homelessness Assistance Act 1987 to define homelessness as the lack of "fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence". Homelessness is notoriously difficult to measure; asking students directly seems to result in an under-measurement of actual homelessness. We follow the measurement strategy laid out by the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice to measure housing security and homelessness (see Goldrick-Rab et al. 2019).

Homelessness

We used two measures of homelessness. First, we asked "In the past 12 months, have you ever been homeless?" Results suggest that 1.5% of UNM students experienced homeless. The results across academic level suggests that graduate students had two times the prevalence of homelessness in the past year compared to associates and undergraduates.

Table 7. Homelessness (single question)*			
	Full Sample (n=812)	Associates & Undergraduates (n=537)	Graduate & Prof Students (n=275)
	%	%	%
No	98.5	98.9	97.8
Yes	1.5	1.1	2.2

* 21 respondents declined to answer

Our second measure of homelessness was combined with questions about housing security. Students were asked to report whether they had slept in a variety of places in the past 12 months. Potential places included campus or university housing; sorority or fraternity; in a house, mobile home or apartment alone or with roommates; at home with family; *or in a shelter, camper, temporarily staying with friends or relatives or couch-surfing, transitional housing, residential program, treatment center, outdoor location, or indoor location not meant for human habitation*. If a student marked that they had slept in any of the places italicized above, they were categorized as having experienced homelessness.

Using this second measure, our results suggest that as of spring 2021, roughly 12% of UNM students experienced homelessness in the previous 12 months. This measurement has potential to overcount homelessness, however, since it does include places like “campground” and “tent”, which could be interpreted by students to include these spaces even when more standard housing is also available.

Table 8. Frequency of Places Slept in Past 12 Months (N=817)		
Places Students Reported Sleeping in the Past 12 Months	n	%
Campus or university housing	122	14.9
Sorority/fraternity house	9	1.1
In a rented or owned house, mobile home, or apartment (alone or with roommates or friends)	414	50.6
In a rented or owned house, mobile home, or apartment with my family (parent, guardian, or relative)	433	52.0
*At a shelter	0	0
*In a camper	14	1.7
*Temporarily staying with a relative, friend, or couch surfing until I find other housing	78	9.5
*In transitional housing, independent living program, a group home, halfway house or residential program, or a treatment center	8	0.98
*Outdoor location (such as street, sidewalk, or alley; bus or train stop; campground or woods, park, beach, or riverbed; under bridge or overpass; or other)	13	1.6
*In a closed area/space with a roof not meant for human habitation (such as abandoned building; car, truck, van, RV, or camper; encampment or tent; unconverted garage, attic, or basement; etc.)	11	1.3
Homelessness Status		
No	719	88.0
Yes (at least one *option indicated)	98	12.0

Housing Insecurity

We measured housing insecurity with eight questions about housing problem, including: rent or mortgage increases that were difficult to pay; underpayment of utilities, rent, or mortgage; default on an account; moving in with others because of financial problems; living with others beyond the expected capacity of the home; or leaving a home because of safety concerns. We also asked how many times had a respondent moved in the past 12 months. Students were considered housing insecure if they answered "yes" to any of the first eight questions or if they said they moved three or more times in the past 12 months.

> "…I was forced to move.... So, you know, I had to find an apartment during a housing shortage and come up with enough money to move in and come up with enough money to have everything started up. Which you know, the minimum is around 1,000 dollars. I work part-time. So, coming up with 1,000 dollars on a part-time salary at slightly higher than minimum wage is very difficult to do. Especially when you are going to school. ….Having to move, pack up, figure out how to get everything set up. I could not focus."

The survey found that 43.6% of respondents were housing insecure in the previous 12 months.

Student Status

Results suggest that housing insecurity was fairly consistent across all student levels. Graduate students had a similar prevalence of housing insecurity as undergraduate students and those pursuing an associate's degree.

> "It was kind of a tough decision between rent and food."

Table 9. Prevalence of Housing Security by Student Status (N = 817).

	Housing Secure		Housing Insecure	
	n	%	n	%
Associates	30	56.7	23	43.4
Undergraduate	270	55.3	218	44.7
Graduate&Prof	161	58.3	115	41.7

Race/Ethnicity

White, Hispanic, Asian and African American students all had lower than UNM average housing insecurity. American Indian, international students, and those who are two or more races experience higher than average housing insecurity. Sixty percent or more of students in these latter three groups experienced housing insecurity.

> "I'm a first-generation college student and it's been hard for me these past couple of years just figuring out like basically everything for myself. I had to figure out financial aid by myself. I have to figure out housing by myself, I had to figure out bills and living and food… It's all your responsibility and it's almost like you don't know how to do it and nobody in your family can assist you because they've never made it this far to go to college. It's like you are almost completely unsupported and going in very blind because no one else in your family has done this before."

These patterns did not always line up with student experiences with food insecurity. Hispanic and African American students experienced higher than average food insecurity, and the latter has among the highest prevalence of all racial/ethnic groups (exceeded only by American Indians). Students who are categorized as two or more races reported lower than average food insecurity but report the highest prevalence of housing insecurity.

Table10. Prevalence of Housing Security by Race/Ethnicity

	Housing Secure		Housing Insecure	
	n	%	n	%
White	182	59.3	125	40.7
Hispanic	187	57.7	137	42.3
Asian	28	73.7	10	26.3
African American or Black	9	69.2	4	30.8
American Indian	21	38.9	33	61.1
Two or more races	8	38.1	13	61.9
International	18	40.0	27	60.0
Unknown or Other	8	53.3	7	46.7

Gender

Females continued to experience more housing insecurity than males, but non-cisgender students experience much higher prevalence of housing insecurity than cis-gender students.

Table 11. Prevalence of Housing Security by Gender Identity				
	Housing Secure		Housing Insecure	
	n	%	n	%
Female	288	53.7	248	46.3
Male	160	64.8	87	35.2
Non-cisgender	12	37.5	20	62.5

Sexual Orientation

Students who self-reported being bisexual, unsure of their sexual orientation, or who self-reported a sexuality other than survey options had the highest prevalence of housing insecurity within this category. The prevalence of housing insecurity among both heterosexual students and gay or lesbian students was lower than the average prevalence among all UNM students.

Table 12. Prevalence of Housing Security by Sexual Orientation				
	Housing Secure		Housing Insecure	
	n	%	n	%
Straight	360	59.7	243	40.3
Gay or lesbian	30	68.2	14	31.8
Bisexual	49	42.6	66	57.4
Not sure	6	30.0	14	70.0
Other	12	41.4	17	58.6

Employment

Students who are unemployed and who are not allowed to work due to the requirements of their degree program have a prevalence of housing insecurity than those who are employed or not looking for work. Students who were employed had a prevalence of housing insecurity similar to the UNM average, but at 42.4% these results suggest that holding a job while seeking a degree does not guarantee basic needs security.

Table 13. Prevalence of Housing Security by Employment Status				
	Housing Secure		Housing Insecure	
	n	%	n	%
Employed	303	57.6	223	42.4
Not employed, looking for work	54	42.2	74	57.8
Not employed, not looking for work	83	68.6	38	31.4
Not allowed to work	21	50.0	21	50.0

Dependents

Students who have others dependent upon them – either children or adults – experienced a higher prevalence of housing insecurity than the UNM average. This was especially marked for students who have adult dependents. Pursuing a degree while caring for others is clearly a challenge for many our students.

Table14. Prevalence of Housing Security by Dependent Status				
	Housing Secure		Housing Insecure	
	n	%	n	%
No dependents	382	59.2	263	40.8
One or more child dependents	57	48.7	60	51.3
One or more adult dependents	14	38.9	22	61.1
Child and adult dependents	8	42.1	11	57.9

Double burden

We define the double burden as the experience of simultaneous food and housing insecurity. Roughly one in five (19.7%) student respondents experienced the double burden. As can be expected from the results presented above, students that most frequently experienced the double burden were: trans (33.3%) or gender fluid (44.4%); bisexual (30.4%) or students who were not sure of their sexuality (40.0%); American Indians (42.6%); students who were unemployed (31.3%); and students with adult dependents (30.6%) or with both adult and child dependents (31.6%).

> "For anyone who has gone into a classroom first thing in the morning and who hasn't had breakfast, focusing on the content of whatever is being discussed is nearly impossible.… So, yeah, it's difficult to focus when you are hungry. Hungry overrules just about everything. But if you are also hungry and tired because wherever you slept either wasn't warm enough or it was too hot or you know, you haven't showered in a few days because the water got shut off again. … Even if you are just worried about not being able to have a place to go home to after class is done or after you are done studying. Or the library closed at nine o'clock and there's nowhere for you to go, at least for another couple of hours because your friend where you are staying on their couch isn't going to be home from work until 2 A.M. That's life. … And to function through that, it's difficult. It's difficult to try to problem solve. You are constantly problem solving to figure out how you are just going to keep going from day to day."

Health Data

General Health Status

Students were asked to rate their general health as excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor. The majority rated their health as good; however, over 20% rated their health as fair and nearly 6% rated their health as poor. On average, students reported their physical health was not good on 4.2 days over the past month and that their mental health was not good on 11.2 days over the past month. In addition, students were kept from usual activities such as self-care, work, or recreation due to poor physical or mental health on an average of 7.2 days over the past month.

Mental Health Status

Indicators of anxiety and depression were assessed using the GAD-2 and PHQ-2, respectively. Among all participants who provided health data, 48.4% screened positive for anxiety based on a GAD-2 score of 3 or higher, and 34.1% screened positive for depression based on a PHQ-2 score of 3 or higher. Thirty percent screened positive for both anxiety and depression.

Mental Health and Basic Needs Insecurity

Seventy-five percent of food insecure students screened positive for anxiety compared to 39.2% of food secure students. Fifty-six percent of food insecure students screened positive for depression compared to 26.6% of food secure students. Nearly two-thirds of housing insecure students screened positive for anxiety compared to 35.2% of housing secure students. Similarly, 49.2% of housing insecure students screened positive for depression compared to just 22.4% of housing secure students.

> "In my fifth semester or the semester after the two years guaranteed funding kind of ran out, it was just a high anxiety time. Just kind of always being aware of how you are spending your money and you know… definitely high stress and high anxiety."

Table 15. Anxiety and Depression by Food Security Status*				
	Food Secure		Food Insecure	
	n	%	n	%
Anxiety				
No anxiety (GAD-2 score <3)	369	60.7	52	25.0
Anxiety (GAD-2 score >3)	239	39.3	156	75.0
Depression				
No depression (PHQ-2 score <3)	446	73.4	92	44.2
Depression (PHQ-2 score >3)	162	26.6	116	55.8

*17 respondents declined to answer

Table 16. Anxiety and Depression by Housing Security Status*				
	Housing Secure		Housing Insecure	
	n	%	n	%
Anxiety				
No anxiety (GAD-2 score <3)	298	64.8	123	34.6
Anxiety (GAD-2 score >3)	162	35.2	233	65.5
Depression				
No depression (PHQ-2 score <3)	357	77.6	181	50.8
Depression (PHQ-2 score >3)	103	22.4	175	49.2

*Data missing for 17 respondents

Lobo Food Pantry

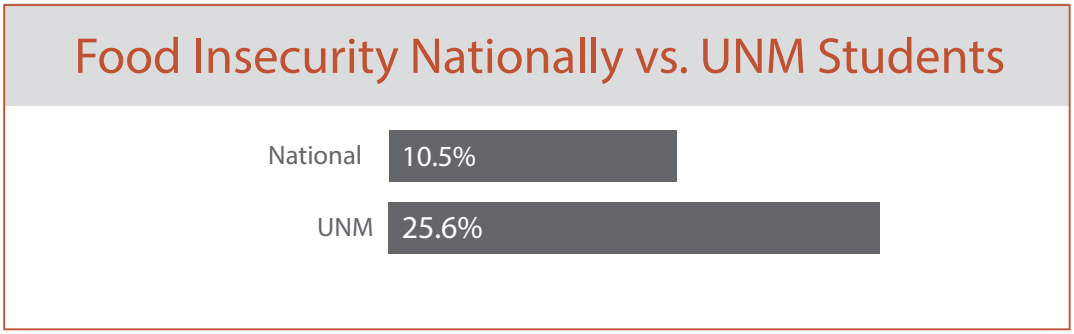
The UNM Lobo Food Pantry was in operation throughout the pandemic, with curtailed, drive-up hours on Mondays from 11-1 pm. We asked survey respondents if they had ever visited the UNM Lobo Food Pantry, and reasons why that had not.

We discovered that about three quarters of students with low food security and two thirds of students with very low food security had not visited the Lobo Food Pantry in the past month. The box most frequently checked for why they had not visited was “Others need this help more than I do”.

Table 17. Reasons for Not Visiting the Lobo Food Pantry		
	n	%
I don't need assistance	258	31.66
I'm not on Main Campus	112	13.74
Inconvenient	20	2.45
Hours are bad	48	5.89
Don't like the selection	3	0.37
I go to another pantry	6	0.74
I don't think I'm eligible	77	9.45
Others need the help more than I do	122	14.97

Conclusions and Recommendations

The 2021 Basic Needs Survey found that food and housing insecurity among UNM students persist. There was some improvement in access to food, but the results show a decline in housing security. Minority and already vulnerable student groups are those that are particularly affected by food and housing insecurity – especially Native American, African American and international students; non-cisgender students, especially those that are gender fluid or other non-binary, and bisexual, unsure about their sexuality, or report another sexuality beyond straight, gay, or lesbian; students who are unemployed or who are not allowed to work by their program of study; and students with dependents, especially adult dependents. Some groups also seemed to have some gains between 2020 and 2021. The prevalence of food and housing insecurity among lesbian and gay students appear to have improved from 2020. Student-parents seem to have improved their food security, as did African American students. Nonetheless, this report shows that all demographic groups among UNM students experience food insecurity at higher than the broader New Mexico and national populations.



Several factors may contribute to our finding that food insecurity among UNM students decreased between 2020 and 2021. First, as a response to the economic disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic, state and federal governments increased and extended nutritional assistance benefits and other financial support, including SNAP, the Pandemic EBT program, and Economic Impact Payments (stimulus checks). Some students were eligible for other funds via other state and federal programs as well. Government assistance may have contributed to the decrease in food insecurity observed in our 2021 survey. On the other hand, given the previous finding that food insecure students are more likely to fail or withdraw from courses (Mechler et al. 2021), and in light of the declining enrollments in the University over the past year – especially among low-income students – it may be that the COVID-19 pandemic prompted students with significant unaddressed basic needs insecurities to discontinue enrollment. Thus, the lower prevalence of food insecurity may reflect the fact that food insecure students are more likely to have left the University between 2020 and 2021.

Supporting Basic Needs Security of UNM Students

Much has been done to support Basic Needs Security of UNM students. Some initiatives to highlight include:

- The Lobo Food Pantry, moved in Fall 2021 into the UNM Student Union Building (SUB) and extended its hours so that it is now open daily. The Lobo Pantry has also gained running water and the administration is working on providing refrigeration, which will improve the offerings available at the Pantry.
- Two new courses have been created that highlight the issues of food and housing security among college students (UHON 301: The Human Rights of College students and PHIL 458/558: Ethics of Hunger).
- At least five courses have integrated the findings of the UNM Basic Needs Study into their course curriculum. Student projects from these courses have included: destigmatization of the lobo pantry through informational graphics, an exhibit at Zimmerman library, the creation of a food recovery app, educational briefs and further research about food insecurity within the Honors College.
- Fundraising for the Lobo Pantry: a crowdfunding site was established (https://impactunm.unmfund.org/project/26651) and The UNM Foundation has established an endowment fund for the pantry: (https://www.unmfund.org/fund/lfp-future-fund-endowment/)
- In November 2021, the UNM Foundation held a fundraising campaign for the pantry and raised $13,913.84.
- The Dean of Students has created a new position of Basic Needs Coordinator, who will run the Food Pantry and in other ways coordinate food and housing services on campus.
- At the state level college hunger is being discussed in Food, Hunger, Water, Ag Policy Workgroup, initiated by former house representative and current Congresswoman Melanie Stansbury and Representative Barbara Ferrary, and in the Food, Hunger, and Farm Steering Committee, led by the Governor's office.
- The Higher Education Department has established $100,000 Funded Grant for addressing food insecurity in higher education.
- The Basic Needs Report is cited on NM Health and Human Services Website: https://www.hsd.state.nm.us/2021/03/01/more-college-students-now-eligible-for-snap-food-benefits-through-coronavirus-relief/

But of course, more could be done. Some potential ways to further support basic needs security among UNM students include:

Students:

- Consider using ASUNM student fees to address food and housing insecurity.
- Institute a meal donation program where students donate unused dining hall meal points. See Swipe Out Hunger.

Faculty:

- Be aware that food and housing insecurity can disrupt a student's ability to complete their work, access texts and other materials for class, or participate in field trips. Offering flexibility on deadlines or supporting students to find alternative (cheaper or free) materials may be very helpful for basic needs insecure students.

- Faculty can also add a basic needs resource statement in their syllabi:

  Hardship: Recent research shows that many students at UNM do not always have adequate access to food and housing (see https://www.unmfund.org/fund/lfp-future-fund-endowment/). These hardships can create barriers to academic success and physical and mental wellbeing. There are resources available on campus that can help, including the UNM Lobo Food Pantry (https://loborespect.unm.edu); assistance with applying for food stamp (SNAP) benefits through the Women's Resource Center (https://women.unm.edu/resources/financial.html); assistance with FAFSA financial aid forms through American Indian Student Services (https://aiss.unm.edu/faq.html); and short term emergency loans through the Dean of Students (https://dos.unm.edu/services/short-term-loans.html). Note: The WRC and AISS will help all students. These resources tend to be underutilized so do not hesitate to take advantage of them. Think of them as tools in your toolkit for success! If lack of resources prevents you from accessing the required texts or otherwise completing your work in this class, please see me and I will work to find ways to support you.

Administration:

- Establish a university wide basic needs insecurity task force consisting of students, faculty, and staff.
- Increase funding to emergency grant programs.
- Fund food scholarships such as providing dining hall meal plans.
- Fund housing vouchers.

State/Federal level:

- Revise EBT policies to allow SNAP benefits to be used towards campus meal plans.
- Keep the policy created during the pandemic of allowing on campus work study eligibility (without actually participating in work study) to count towards the work requirement for SNAP eligibility.
- Consider eliminating the 20 hour a week work requirement for college students for SNAP eligibility (possibly by revising what counts as "employment and training programs" in higher education, per GAO, 2018).
- Fund a statewide study to determine the prevalence of, and evidence-based solutions for, basic needs insecurity in NM institutions of higher education.

Citations:

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