Today's College Students: Myths vs Reality

Financial Support

Myth: College students are financially dependent on their parents/guardians.

Reality: 49% of college students financially independent. They are not relying on family to pay for their education.[1]

"I cannot afford school, bills, and food. I do not qualify to get EBT, I pay for school, food, and bills out of pocket."
- NM College Student

Basic Needs Security

Myth: Students have stable housing and enough food while attending college.

Reality: 14% of NM college students reported were homeless in 2022, and 39% faced rent increases. 58% of NM students are food insecure, with 39% experiencing very low food security, the most severe category of food insecurity.

"The rent prices are more than a mortgage payment and I cannot qualify for a home loan because I have not had a job long enough since I was a full-time student... "

- NM College Student

Food Assistance

Myth: Campus food pantries and federal assistance programs meet the needs of food-insecure students.

Reality: Only 29% of New Mexico's food-insecure students use campus food pantries, and many are unaware of their eligibility for SNAP/EBT.[4]

"I make very little money, and my food stamps were recently cut and will no longer cover the cost of food."
- NM College Student

Scholarships

Myth: The Opportunity Scholarship covers the cost of college.

Reality: Although beneficial, the Opportunity Scholarship only covers the cost of tuition. The cost of going to college includes fees, books, housing and food which are not covered



Demographics of College Students

National

- 18% of students are Hispanic/Latino.
- 43% of students identify as a minority[2].
- 37% of students are older than 25 [1].
- 55% of students are first-generation[1].

New Mexico

- 50% students enrolled are Hispanic[2].
- The average student age is 26.
- 71% of students are a minority[3].
- Over half of all UNM students are first generation.

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Full-Time vs Part-Time

Myth: College students are full-time learners who can focus solely on school.

Reality: 31% of college students are enrolled part-time, having to balance school with work and other commitments.[1]

"I have just started freshman classes, the lack of a degree makes it hard to find a good job to cover all my expenses. I also am restricted to 6 hours of possible work time if I had a job because my daughter just started preschool."
- NM College Student

Myth: Most college students don't have paid employment.

Reality: 63% of New Mexico college students are employed, and yet they still report struggling paying for tuition, fees, and living expenses.[4]

"Time is the biggest factor for me in not eating as healthy as I would like, as working and going to school keep me pretty busy so I rely a lot on fast food and cheap processed food."
- NM College Student

Equity

Myth: All college students face challenges equally.

Reality: Food insecurity is highest among Native American and Black students, and LGBTQ+ students also experience higher rates of basic needs insecurity than their heterosexual peers.[4]

Mental Health

Myth: College students are carefree.

Reality: Nearly 44% of New Mexico college students report symptoms of anxiety, and 34% experience depression.[4]

"The worrying and planning drove my grades down from straight A's to barely passing B's. I would miss multiple days of class because of lack of sleep and anxiety attacks."
- NM College Student

Citations

1. "Today's Students." *Today's Students Coalition*, 17 July 2024, todaysstudents.org.

2. Johnston, Clay. "The Economic Impact of College Degrees." *College Possible*, 16 Aug. 2023, collegepossible.org/news/the-economic-impact-of-college-degrees/.

3. Joseph, Alex. "Food Pantries Ease Food Insecurity on College Campuses." Arkansas Foundation for Medical Care.

4. Cargas, Sarita, et al. Basic Needs Insecurity among New Mexico College Students. University of New Mexico Basic Needs Project, 2023.

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