



WINSTON-SALEM
STATE UNIVERSITY

Winston-Salem Report on Food Security and Housing Accessibility Among Post-Secondary Students



Winston-Salem



UNC Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention



Introduction

Food security and housing accessibility are two major concerns facing post-secondary students today. A study from 2019, conducted by Olfert and colleagues, found that out of over 22,000 individuals from 22 postsecondary institutions, 44% qualified as food insecure and 52% qualified as housing insecure. **1** Another study by The Hope Center in 2020 found that 58% of the 195,000 students participating in their #RealCollege Survey experienced food insecurity, housing insecurity, or homelessness. **2**

These numbers are staggering; more than half of those students were struggling to have their basic needs met. Concerns about food security and housing accessibility among college students have only been exacerbated since then by the COVID-19 pandemic which continues to affect students' ability to make ends meet.

The inability of college students to meet their basic needs has significant impact on mental/physical health as well as academic performance. Food insecurity is associated with lower productivity and learning ability and poorer academic outcomes. In addition to these, poorer nutrition, higher stress, and increased depression are also associated with food insecurity. **3**

To ensure that college students have the resources necessary to complete their degrees, institutions must ensure that their basic needs are met. Without these baseline needs, students may not persist to graduation. The following survey conducted among students at Winston-Salem State University aims to assess whether basic needs related to food and housing are being met, what the barriers are to meeting those needs, and what may be done to ensure basic needs of students are met.

Background

Winston-Salem State University and the Winston-Salem College Advisory Board received a two-year (2020-2022) National League of Cities Communities of Practice Grant. The grant was awarded to municipalities working jointly with postsecondary institutions to remove barriers to graduation for students attending postsecondary institutions.

The Winston-Salem College Advisory Board is a coalition of Colleges and Universities in the city. This list of institutions includes: Wake Forest University, Salem College, UNC - School of the Arts, Forsyth Technical Community College, and Winston-Salem State University. This report focuses specifically on Winston-Salem State University.

Two barriers, food insecurity and off-campus housing inaccessibility, were selected by Winston-Salem State University and the Winston-Salem College Advisory Board as the focus of the survey to determine how pervasive they are among the student body. This information will then be used by both parties to determine what actions should be taken to help address both food insecurity and off-campus house inaccessibility to improve the postsecondary graduation rate among students at Winston-Salem State University.

For the purposes of this survey, housing insecurity was stated as being defined by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development as "...an umbrella term that encompasses several dimensions of housing problems people may experience, including affordability, safety, quality, insecurity, and loss of housing." **4**

Survey Methods

The survey was conducted via an online form that was made available from November 18, 2021 to December 2, 2021. All students attending Winston-Salem State University (4,726 undergraduate and 500 graduate) were invited to complete the survey via an email sent to a listserv from the Dean's email.

Multiple choice questions were used to assess the number of students facing these hardships while free response questions were used to collect information on the barriers/circumstances creating these hardships. Data from free response questions were read in full and a code book was created to determine common themes among responses. Responses were then grouped together based on those themes. Demographic information was collected to assess the representativeness of the survey.

Results

The survey was completed by a total of 184 students of which 164 were undergraduates, 19 were graduates, and 1 was another classification. Most survey participants, 97%, qualified as full-time enrollees. Further breakdown of demographic information can be found below in Table 1. Notably, 86% of survey participants identified as Black or African American; this is due to Winston-Salem State University's status as a historically black college or university (HBCU). Student responses to survey question related to food and housing challenges are shown in Table 2.

Table 1: Respondent Demographics

	n (%)
School Level (n=184)	
Undergraduate	164 (89)
Graduate	19 (10)
Other	1 (1)
Student Status (n=184)	
Full-time	178 (97)
Part-time	6 (3)
Number of Dependents (n=183)	
None	145 (79)
1	18 (10)
2-4	13 (7)
More than 4	3 (2)
Prefer not to say	4 (2)
Hispanic/Latino(a) (n=185)	
Yes	4 (2)
No	180 (97)
Prefer not to say	1 (1)
Race (n=185)	
Black or African American	159 (86)
Asian	1 (1)
White/Caucasian	20 (11)
Other	3 (2)
Prefer not to say	2 (1)

Fifty-eight percent of those who participated in the survey reported that they had skipped a meal or slept to alleviate hunger due to lack of access to food in the last three months. Thirty-six percent of students had or had known someone who has experienced housing insecurity with 31% of students

knowing someone who has had to take a break from school due to housing insecurity. Both of these data points make it clear that food insecurity and housing insecurity are substantial issues among students attending Winston-Salem State University.

Table 2: Student Experiences with Food Access and Housing Insecurity

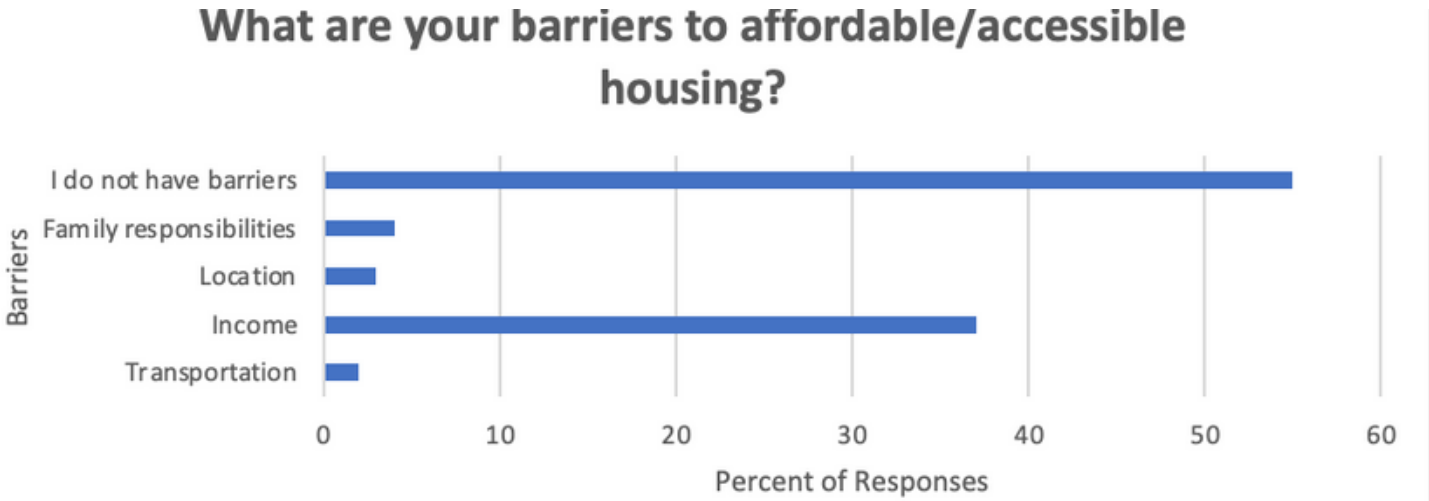
	Yes	No	Prefer not to say
Do you have access to three meals a day if you want them? (n=185)	159 (86)	22 (12)	4 (2)
In the past three months have you skipped a meal or slept to alleviate hunger due to lack of access to food? (n=184)	70 (38)	106 (58)	8 (4)
Do you feel comfortable using free resources in the community? (i.e., food banks, food pantries) (n=182)	89 (49)	65 (36)	28 (15)
Have you ever paid for a meal for a friend or classmate due to lack of financial resources on their part? (n=182)	121 (66)	55 (30)	6 (3)
Has someone you know had to take a break from school due to housing insecurity? (n=180)	55 (31)	120 (67)	5 (3)
As a college student, has you or anybody you know experienced housing insecurity? (n=181)	66 (36)	113 (62)	2 (1)

Additionally, 36% of students reported that they did not feel comfortable utilizing free resources within the community which could have potentially alleviated the impact of these issues.

Barriers to affordable/accessible housing were assessed via a

multiple choice question which had a list of potential barriers. The most prevalent barrier among the survey group was income which 37% of survey participants listed as a barrier. Family responsibilities (4%) was the next most prevalent with 4% reporting this as a significant barrier (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Barriers to affordable/accessible housing by percent n=186



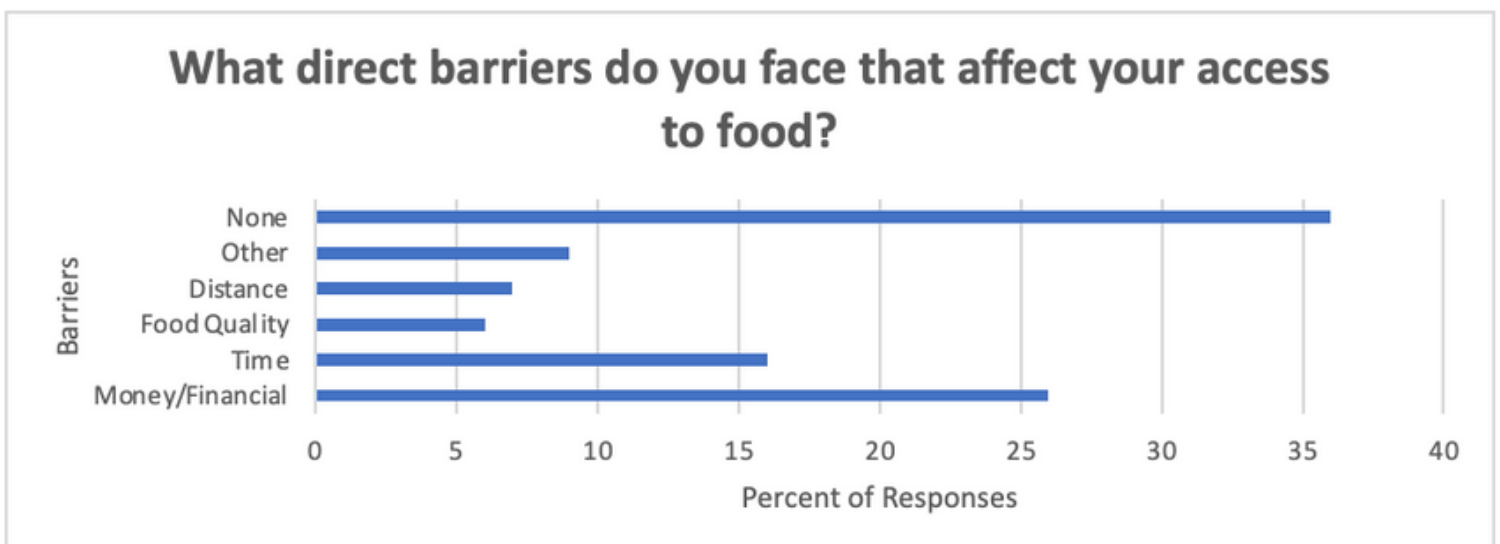
The above responses shed further light on what the income barriers are, with most involving the inability to pay rent. Some survey participants also believe they may have been discriminated against when searching for a lease due to their low socio-economic status.

Figure 2 displays the most commonly reported barriers to food access. Notably, 26% of student reported that money was their most significant barrier while another 16% indicated that time was the most significant barrier (Figure 2). In regards to time as a barrier, these responses indicated that classes or extracurricular

activities kept students past the time in which on campus dining options closed leaving them unable to obtain food.

Many responses to this question included more than one barrier; each barrier listed in these responses was treated as an independent response to get an accurate measure of how often each barrier was occurring. "Other" responses included three responses which indicated dietary restrictions were a concern, three responses listing mental health/motivation to eat, and two responses indicating there were not enough options.

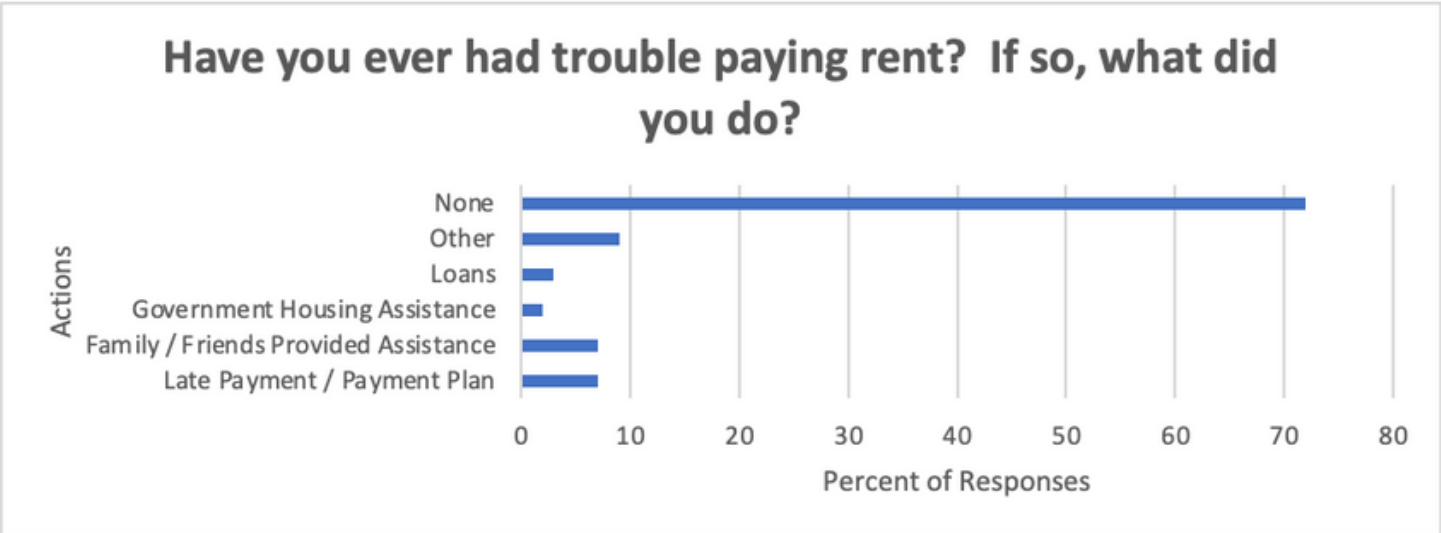
Figure 2: Barriers to food access by percent n=186



The survey also asked participants what they would do if they had trouble paying rent. Twenty-eight percent of students reported that they have had trouble paying rent; late payments / payment plan (7%) and assistance from family /friends (7%) were the top two ways of making rent payments.

Within the “other” category, respondents reported picking up more shifts, taking another job, and cutting back on expenses such as food. A graphical representation of coded responses can be seen in Figure 3.

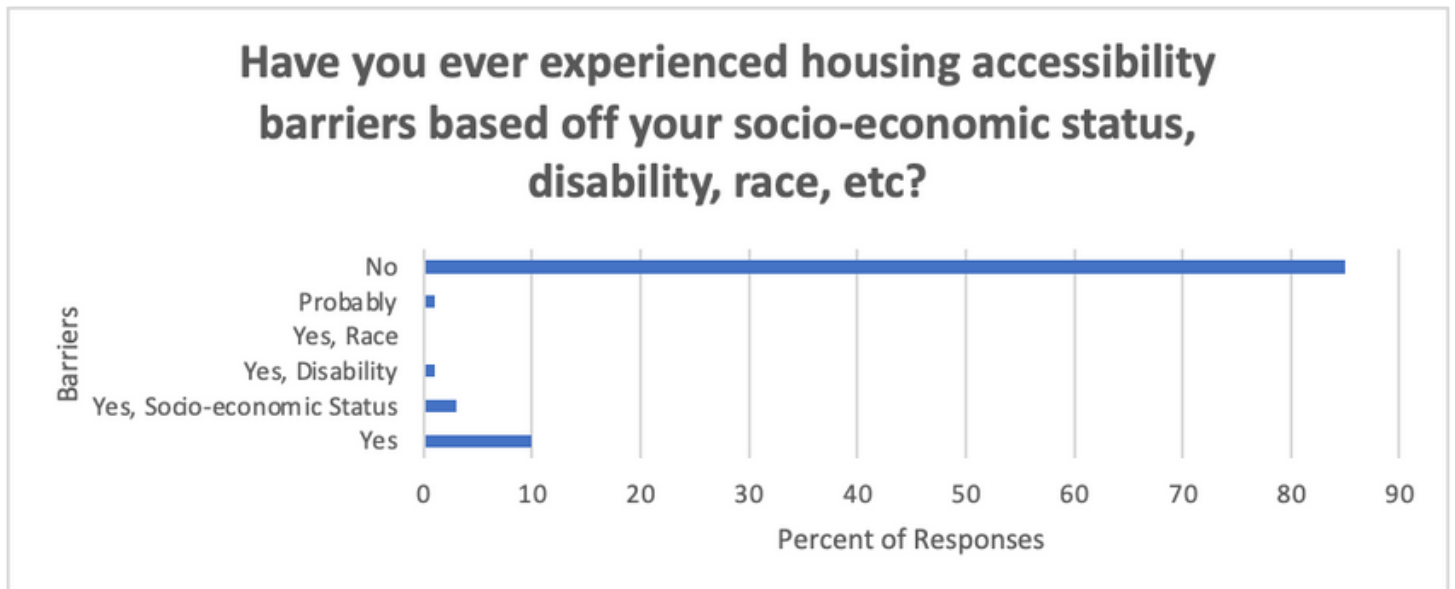
Figure 3: Actions when met with Difficulty Paying Rent n=186



The final free response questions asked survey participants if they had experienced discrimination based on their socio-economic status, disability, race, etc. Of those that responded, 15%

reported that they had faced barriers based on one or more of those criteria with many individuals simply answering “Yes” with no further disclosure. A further breakdown of specific barriers can be found in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Discriminatory barriers to housing accessibility n=186



Recommendations

Collaborate to Provide Housing

To help alleviate barriers to affordable/accessible housing, Winston-Salem State University and the city of Winston-Salem should continue working together to ensure those all students have access to affordable housing while they complete their degree. This could create the additional benefit of potentially alleviating some barriers to food access as financial resources were a large barrier here as well. The HOPE Center has resources available which could be helpful when creating a program to alleviate housing barriers.

Expand Dining Hours

Additionally, Winston-Salem State University could consider expanding their hours for on-campus dining options. The second largest barrier to food access was time with 16% of students reporting that on-campus dining options were not available during the times they were able to get food. Expanding these hours would allow students to have more consistent access to meals through the university.

Change Systems Using Student Feedback

A final recommendation to help alleviate barriers to both housing accessibility and food access is to make modifications to resources available to students. Roughly 1/3 of students reporting that they do not feel comfortable utilizing free resources.

Engaging students in the process of identifying potential strategies for addressing food and housing can help to ensure their needs are met. Having the input of students could help identify resources that they are more comfortable accessing which can help remove barriers to housing accessibility and food access.

References

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- 2) Olfert, M. D., Hagedorn-Hatfield, R. L., Houghtaling, B., Esquivel, M. K., Hood, L. B., MacNell, L., Soldavini, J., Berner, M., Savoie Roskos, M. R., Hingle, M. D., Mann, G. R., Waity, J. F., Knol, L. L., Walsh, J., Kern-Lyons, V., Paul, C., Pearson, K., Goetz, J. R., Spence, M., ... Coleman, P. (2021). Struggling with the basics: Food and housing insecurity among college students across twenty-two colleges and universities. *Journal of American College Health: J of ACH*, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2021.1978456>
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- 4) Bucholtz, S. (2018, November 19). Measuring Housing Insecurity in the American Housing Survey | HUD USER. US Department of Housing and Urban Development. <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/pdredge/pdr-edge-frm-asst-sec-111918.html>