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Basic Needs Insecurity at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

A #RealCollegeHBCU Report

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January 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were established primarily in the post-Civil War era to meet the educational needs of Black Americans.¹ They provide pathways to upward social mobility and have a long-standing commitment to promoting both academic success and students' health and well-being.² But persistent funding inequities at both the state and federal level actively undermine those commitments and leave the sector particularly vulnerable during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.³

How are students at HBCUs faring, and to what extent are their basic needs supported so that they can focus on learning and attain degrees? This report uses data from the #RealCollege Survey to examine the overlapping pandemic-related and basic needs challenges affecting students attending HBCUs during fall 2020. In total, nearly 5,000 students from 14 public and private HBCUs responded to the survey for a response rate of 8.3% and shared their experiences:

OUR SURVEY WAS COMPLETED BY



NEARLY
5000
STUDENTS



FROM
14 PUBLIC AND
PRIVATE HBCUs



WITH A
8.3% RESPONSE
RATE

THESE STUDENTS TOLD US

2/3

of HBCU students
experienced basic
needs insecurity



46%
experienced food
insecurity in the
prior 30 days



55%
were housing
insecure in the
prior 12 months



20%
experienced
homelessness in the
prior 12 months

WE ALSO LEARNED

Many students
lost their jobs
during the pandemic

HBCUs



4-Year MSIs



PBCCs



Full-time

Part-time

HBCU STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH COVID-19

8% of students got sick

52% of students had a family member or friend get sick

24% of students had a family member or friend die

These are pressing needs, and there are compelling opportunities to address them. The work could begin by connecting students at HBCUs to existing resources and expanding the availability of those resources. Emergency aid to HBCUs must be increased, since only 38% of students dealing with housing and/or food shortfalls received federal pandemic emergency aid through the CARES Act. With additional federal and state support, institutions could also increase staffing to help students connect to public benefits programs. Fewer than half of HBCU students experiencing basic needs insecurity were receiving any type of public benefits, and barely one in five received help from their institution to apply for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

This report outlines the evidence guiding these recommendations and others to support HBCUs and their students. The Hope Center is committed to acting on these data through [#RealCollegeHBCU](#), a capacity-building initiative with the Center for the Study of HBCUs that will support HBCUs to build an ecosystem of basic needs supports for their students.



Photo courtesy of Morgan State University



PAUL QUINN COLLEGE

Office of the President

January 2022

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) occupy a unique place in this country's history. HBCUs were founded to play a critical role in transforming four million people who were enslaved and held without access to education and wealth, into American citizens. With that as their charge, and with a basic understanding of race in this country, one does not need to be a cultural anthropologist to recognize that the path forward for these institutions and their communities, was never going to be an easy one.

The wealth gap that exists today between white and Black America has its roots in the same place as HBCUs – slavery. Slaves were not paid for their labor. Nor were they allowed to own land or accumulate wealth. As such, while generations of white families have thrived economically, those same generations of African-American families have struggled to attain even financial stability.

When this historical perspective is combined with the reality of pandemic life, we see how African-American families have been caught in a fragile state. As Thomas Paine once wrote with a different era in mind, "These are the times that try men's souls." Even for the strongest, most economically stable among us, COVID-19 has created hardships. When the strong struggle, the weak often perish.

In general, 75% of students who attend HBCUs are African-American and therefore, have some familial history with slavery. Approximately 70% of all HBCU students are eligible for Pell Grants. These baseline numbers all but guarantee that the data gathered by the #RealCollegeHBCU Report ("Report") would tell a story of economic tenuousness. Per the Report (which included the thoughts and experiences of 5,000 students from 14 HBCUs), 46% of the respondents experienced food insecurity in the prior 30 days; more than half (55%) were housing insecure in the prior 12 months; and 20% have been homeless in the past year. These numbers speak to something far greater than an HBCU problem or an African-American problem. These numbers speak to an American problem. One which if allowed to go unchecked will compromise the future of too many talented citizens. As you read this report, I challenge you to ask yourself two questions. First, what are we as a society doing so wrong that our student class is struggling on such a basic needs level? Secondly, what are we going to do to fix it?

Thank you for supporting #RealCollege. Thank you for caring.

Michael J. Sorrell, Ed.D.
President
Paul Quinn College

INTRODUCTION

The pandemic continues to rapidly change higher education. Since the pandemic began, countless college students have lost their jobs, been physically displaced, become hungry or homeless, or experienced other negative impacts.⁴ The challenges disproportionately affect students within urban communities of color, poorly resourced rural districts, and minoritized students—including many of the students that HBCUs serve.

HBCUs were established primarily in the post-Civil War era to meet the educational needs of Black Americans. There are 105 accredited public and private HBCUs located across 21 states and territories, down from over 120 in the early twentieth century.⁵ Most HBCUs are in the southeastern region of the United States.⁶ HBCUs represent just 3% of U.S. higher education institutions but enroll approximately 300,000 students, including large numbers of structurally minoritized students and Pell-eligible learners.⁷ Punching well above their weight, HBCUs produce over 20% of Black Americans' bachelor's degrees, 30% of Black engineers and scientists, 50% of Black lawyers, 80% of Black federal judges, and, most recently, the nation's first woman to serve as U.S. Vice President (Kamala Harris, Howard University graduate).⁸ They not only serve high proportions of economically disenfranchised students but facilitate the students' upward mobility.⁹

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HBCUs also generate \$14.8 billion in economic impact annually.¹⁰ They create almost 135,000 jobs in local and regional economies, including off-campus jobs produced by HBCU-related spending.¹¹ Many of these jobs are in industries (e.g., hospitality) and minority-owned businesses that have experienced extreme distress during the pandemic.¹²

The disproportionate impact of the pandemic on HBCUs and their students exacerbates pre-existing racialized inequities.¹³ Students across the country face a set of structural obstacles that drive student basic needs insecurity, including rising wealth and income inequality, declining state and federal support for higher education, rising college costs, and a weak social safety net.¹⁴ These issues, called the “new economics of college,” hit students at HBCUs especially hard.¹⁵



Photo courtesy of Morgan State University

Amid declines in federal funding for higher education, HBCUs have experienced comparatively steep cuts, compounding a long history of government disinvestment in these institutions.¹⁶ This harm is compounded as inequitable funding for HBCUs collides with the impacts of structural racism on their students. For example, HBCU students face higher rates of student debt due to the underfunding of their institutions, a paucity of need-based aid in states where HBCUs are concentrated, and discriminatory policies and practices that make it difficult for Black families to build wealth.¹⁷ Moreover, a legacy of racist policymaking has undermined the social safety net, employing ineffective work requirements to keep many Black students and their families from crucial supports.¹⁸ In other words, HBCUs and their students acutely experience the new economics of college and highlight the many ways these forces perpetuate systemic racism.

HBCUs have a long-standing commitment to meeting students' basic needs. Early histories of HBCUs vividly document how faculty and staff went above and beyond to make sure students had enough to eat, clothes to wear, and a safe place to sleep.¹⁹ Oftentimes, faculty and staff brought students to their own homes for a "home-cooked meal."²⁰ HBCU staff frequently see themselves as guardians of their institutions and students, shielding them from harm and providing necessary supports.²¹ A recent study found that basic needs insecurity was a top concern for administrators at Historically Black Community Colleges (HBCCs) dealing with the challenges of change presented by the pandemic.²²

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Even with caring individuals at the helm, there are additional opportunities to harness resources and build capacity to support basic needs work at HBCUs. To understand where resources are needed, we must first understand the basic needs of their students. This report sheds light on the extent of overlapping pandemic and basic needs challenges for students attending HBCUs to inform the work ahead.



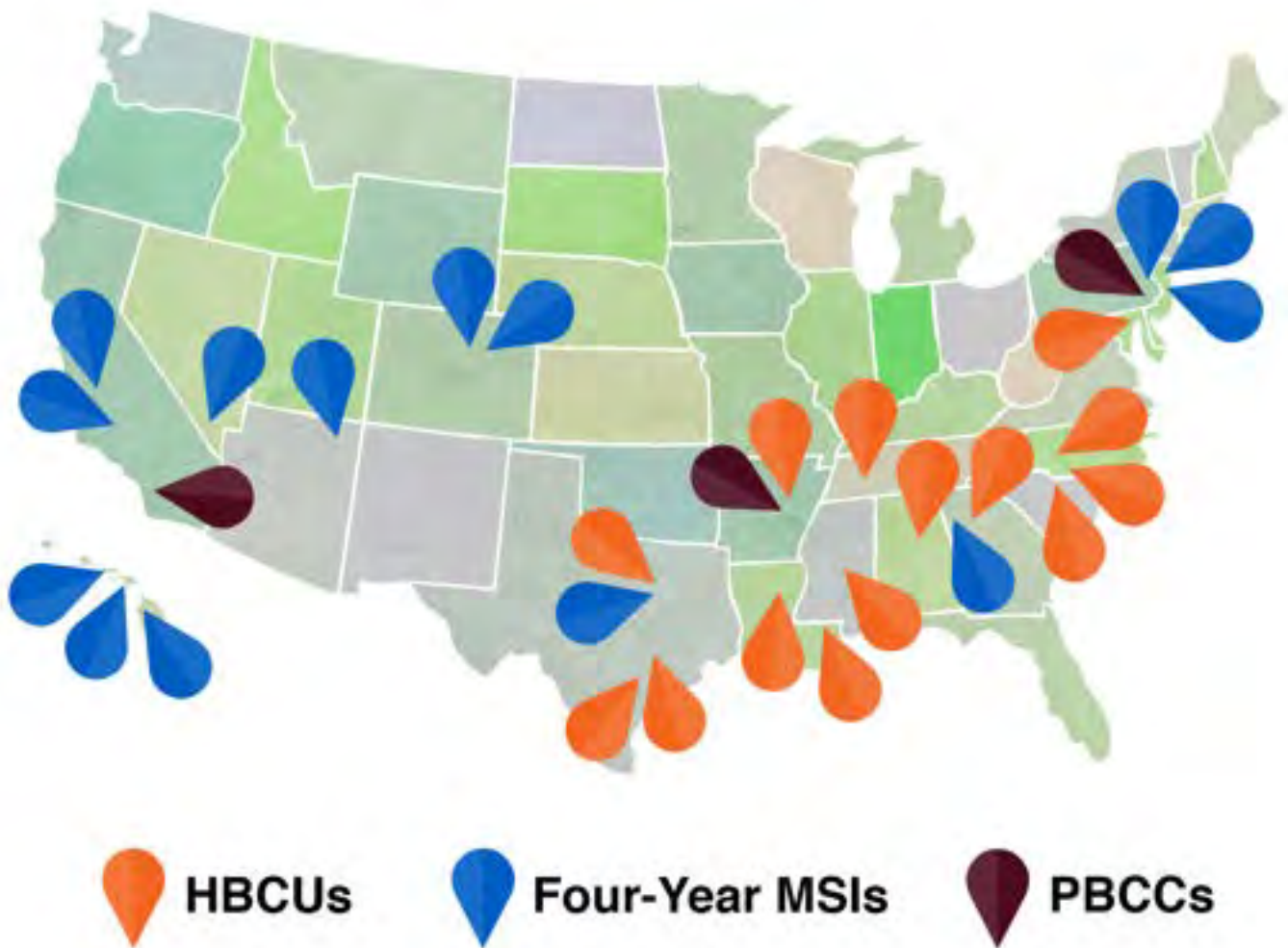
The Data

In fall 2020, 14 HBCUs fielded the #RealCollege Survey. Seven of the HBCUs that participated are public, seven are private, and all are four-year institutions. Participating institutions emailed the survey to all enrolled students between September and November 2020. In total, the survey was sent to over 56,700 HBCU students and completed by nearly 5,000 of them, yielding an estimated response rate of 8.3%. (See [web appendices](#) for more information on fielding and response rates for other institution types.)

Public HBCUs	Private HBCUs
<p>Fayetteville State University</p> <p>Grambling State University</p> <p>Jackson State University</p> <p>Morgan State University</p> <p>Prairie View A&M University</p> <p>Texas Southern University</p> <p>University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff</p>	<p>Clayton University</p> <p>Dillard University</p> <p>Johnson C. Smith University</p> <p>Lane College</p> <p>Paul Quinn College</p> <p>Spelman College</p> <p>Talladega College</p>

To contextualize and draw additional lessons from HBCU students' responses, we include comparisons to students at 14 four-year Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) that are not HBCUs ("four-year MSIs"), as well as three Predominantly Black Community Colleges (PBCCs; Figure 1).

FIGURE 1 | MAP OF PARTICIPATING COLLEGES, BY COLLEGE TYPE



Source | [Center for the Study of MSIs MSI Directory](#), 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes | HBCUs = Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Four-Year MSIs = four-year Minority Serving Institutions that are not HBCUs, PBCCs = two-year Predominantly Black Institutions. For more information on institution types, refer to the "Defining Institution Types" section. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

Like HBCUs, other types of MSIs serve large numbers of students from marginalized racial and ethnic backgrounds and Pell-eligible students, meaning that the students attending these institutions may face some broadly similar challenges (see [web appendices](#) for background information on survey respondents at each of the three institution types). However, four-year MSIs and PBCCs differ from HBCUs in important ways. They have different institutional histories and missions, do not always share HBCUs' core commitment to educating Black students, and have not experienced government under-funding to the same extent. Moreover, most four-year MSIs do not serve large numbers of Black students similar to HBCUs; they primarily serve students from other marginalized racial and ethnic backgrounds, like Latinx, Asian, and Indigenous students. Like HBCCs, PBCCs serve relatively large shares of Black students at two-year institutions. However, all HBCUs represented in these data are four-year institutions, which operate differently and often have different priorities than two-year institutions. These important contextual differences must be kept in mind when comparing data between institution types.

DEFINING INSTITUTION TYPES

HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities):

According to the Center for the Study of MSIs, “HBCUs are colleges and universities founded before 1964 and were originally intended to provide higher education to African American communities.”²³ There are 105 HBCUs, including 12 Historically Black Community Colleges (HBCCs), which are two-year institutions.²⁴ All 14 HBCUs represented in our data are four-year institutions.

Four-year MSIs (Minority-Serving Institutions):

In this report, “four-year MSIs” refers to four-year minority serving institutions that are not HBCUs.²⁵ Our data includes students attending 14 four-year MSIs. Most of those institutions are Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs), Alaska Native-Serving and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions (ANNHs), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), and/or Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs). We also have one four-year Predominantly Black Institution (PBI).

PBCCs (Predominantly Black Community Colleges):

In this report, “Predominantly Black Community Colleges” refers to two-year PBIs. PBIs are distinct from HBCUs and defined not by their history or mission but by the composition of their student body. At PBIs, “undergraduate students who identify as Black make up at least 40% of total enrollment and students who identify as low-income and/or first-generation college students make up at least 30% of total enrollment.”²⁶ Our data includes students attending three PBCCs.

What are Students' Basic Needs?

The Hope Center defines **student basic needs** as access to the following: nutritious and sufficient food; safe, secure, and adequate housing (to sleep, study, cook, and shower); healthcare to promote sustained mental and physical well-being; affordable technology and transportation; resources for personal hygiene care; and childcare and related needs.²⁷

Basic needs insecurity refers to the experience of not having access to the necessities listed above. Basic needs insecurity is considered a structural problem, not an individual flaw; it means that there is not an ecosystem in place to ensure that students' basic needs are being met. **Basic needs security** means an ecosystem to meet student basic needs is in place.

The 2020 #RealCollege Survey focused on three types of basic needs insecurity:



Food insecurity is the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe food, or the ability to acquire such food in a socially acceptable manner.²⁸ The most extreme form is often accompanied by physiological sensations of hunger. The 2020 #RealCollege Survey assessed food security among students using the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) 18-item set of questions.²⁹



Housing insecurity encompasses a broad set of challenges that prevent someone from having a safe, affordable, and consistent place to live.³⁰ Housing insecurity among students is assessed with a nine-item set of questions developed by The Hope Center that looks at factors such as the ability to pay rent or utilities and the need to move frequently.



Homelessness means that a person does not have a fixed, regular, and adequate place to live. In alignment with the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, students are considered homeless if they identified experiencing homelessness or identified living in conditions that are signs of homelessness (for instance, in a shelter, temporarily with a relative, or in a space not meant for human habitation).³¹ Using a more inclusive definition of homelessness is critical to supporting students, as students in both groups often experience comparable challenges.³²

Rates of “any basic needs insecurity” presented reflect students experiencing food insecurity, housing insecurity, and/or homelessness. While the measures presented here look at basic needs during distinct periods—the prior month for food insecurity and the prior year for housing insecurity and homelessness—basic needs insecurity is fluid, and students' experiences with basic needs may change over time.³³

IMPACTS OF THE PANDEMIC ON HBCU STUDENTS

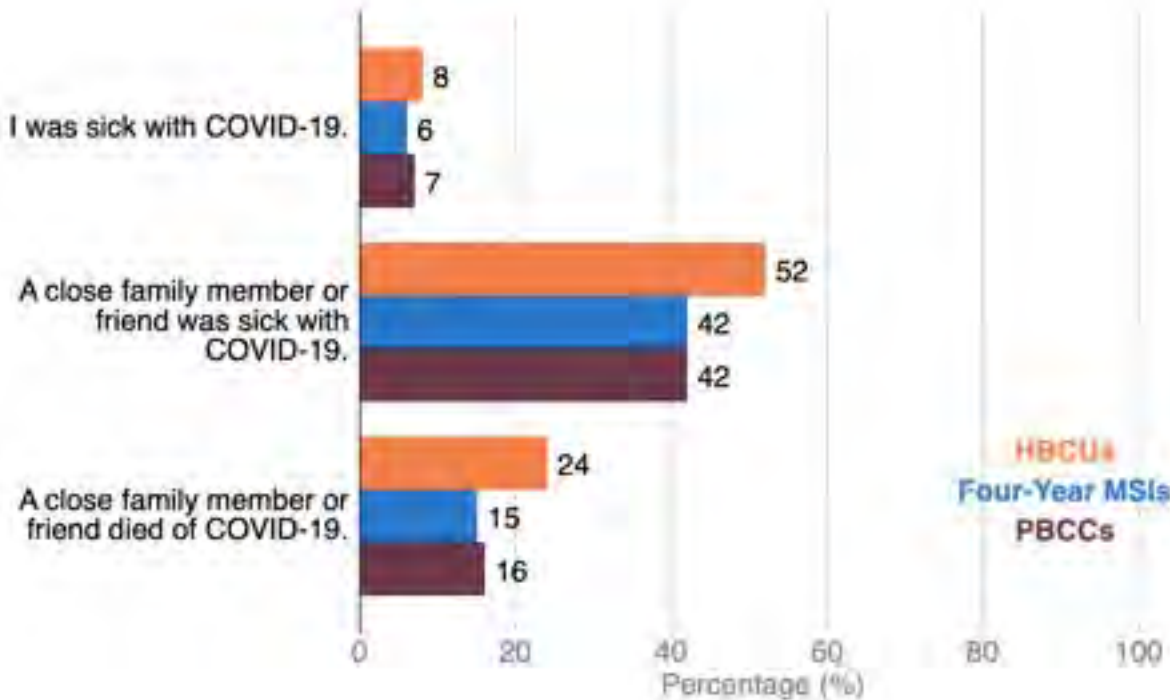
This section of the report looks back on the specific challenges students at HBCUs faced in fall 2020. Over half a year into a global pandemic, students reflected on their health, employment, and families in the context of the pandemic.

Health

Studies across the nation have demonstrated wide racial and ethnic disparities in COVID-19 infections, hospitalizations, and deaths. COVID-19 has disproportionately affected Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and multiracial people.³⁴ Reflecting these national trends, students at HBCUs experienced COVID-19 infections and deaths in their immediate social circles much more frequently than other college students. Over half of HBCU survey participants had a close friend or family member contract COVID-19, a rate 10 percentage points higher than their peers at four-year MSIs and PBCCs (Figure 2). Additionally, nearly a quarter of HBCU students lost a loved one to COVID-19, and 8% reported being sick with the disease themselves. With the pandemic still raging, these numbers are likely higher today.³⁵ Colleges must support HBCU students who deal with these challenges, particularly considering emerging knowledge about persistent long-term effects of COVID-19 and associations between self-reported COVID-19 infections, food security, and mental health.³⁶

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FIGURE 2 | PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH COVID-19, BY INSTITUTION TYPE



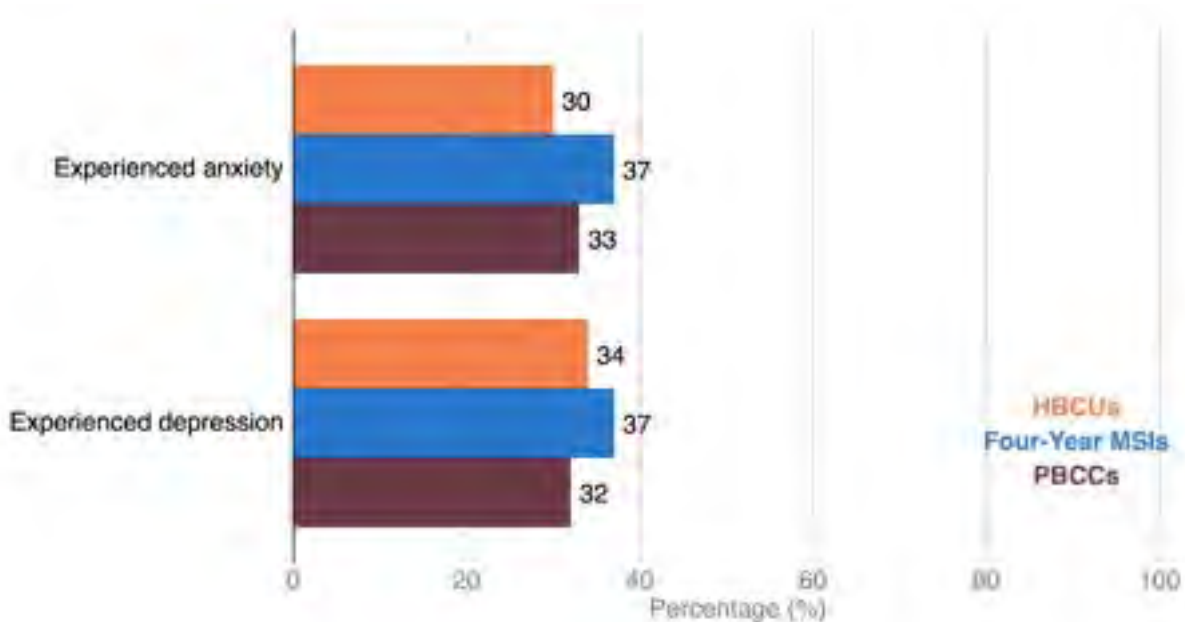
Source | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes | Experiences with COVID-19 are not mutually exclusive. HBCUs = Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Four-Year MSIs = four-year Minority Serving Institutions that are not HBCUs, PBCCs = two-year Predominantly Black Institutions. For more information on institution types, refer to the “Defining Institution Types” section. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

HBCU students struggled with mental health challenges during the pandemic. An April 2021 survey commissioned by the United Negro College Fund (UNCF), the Center for Responsible Lending, and the Center for Community Capital at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill found that 44% of Black respondents attending HBCUs said “stress about the pandemic has impacted my grades.”³⁷

Underreporting of mental health challenges presents difficulties in interpreting mental health data, particularly for Black survey respondents for many reasons, including perceptions of social stigma.³⁸ Even so, survey results can provide a meaningful, likely low-end estimation of mental health at HBCUs. In the #RealCollege Survey, three in ten students at HBCUs experienced anxiety, while 34% experienced depression (Figure 3). These rates were similar to those for students at PBCCs and slightly lower than students at four-year MSIs. The high rates of anxiety and depression across all types of institutions deserve additional attention.

FIGURE 3 | ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION, BY INSTITUTION TYPE



Source | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

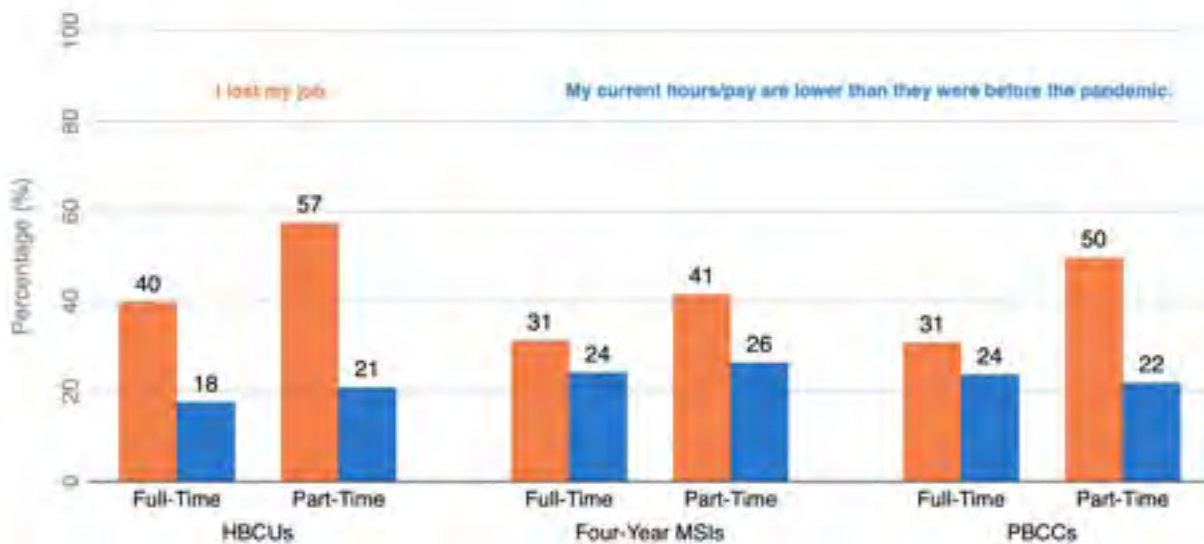
Notes | Students “experienced anxiety” by indicating they experienced moderate to severe anxiety in the prior two weeks; students “experienced depression” by indicating they experienced moderate, moderately severe, or severe levels of depression in the prior two weeks. For more details on measures of anxiety and depression used in this report, refer to the [web appendices](#). Experiences with anxiety and depression are not mutually exclusive. HBCUs = Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Four-Year MSIs = four-year Minority Serving Institutions that are not HBCUs, PBCCs = two-year Predominantly Black Institutions. For more information on institution types, refer to the “Defining Institution Types” section. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

Employment

Amid widespread layoffs and furloughs happening across the country at the start of the pandemic, Black, Latinx, and other workers of color were disproportionately impacted.³⁹ Prior research by The Hope Center showed that many college students lost their jobs or experienced cuts to pay or hours in the early months of the pandemic—with Black students being among the hardest hit.⁴⁰ As of fall 2021, national unemployment rates remained higher than before the pandemic and continued to show deep racial and ethnic inequalities.⁴¹

Compared to those at four-year MSIs and PBCCs, more HBCU survey respondents had lost their primary job by fall 2020 (Figure 4). Fifty-seven percent of HBCU students whose primary job before the pandemic was part-time and 40% whose primary job was full-time lost their job. An additional one-in-five experienced reduced pay or hours.

FIGURE 4 | CHANGES IN STUDENT EMPLOYMENT DURING THE PANDEMIC, BY PRE-PANDEMIC JOB STATUS AND INSTITUTION TYPE



Source | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes | Results are among students who had at least one job before the pandemic. Students with full-time employment worked 35 or more hours a week, and students with part-time employment worked less than 35 hours a week. HBCUs = Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Four-Year MSIs = four-year Minority Serving Institutions that are not HBCUs, PBCCs = two-year Predominantly Black Institutions. For more information on institution types, refer to the “Defining Institution Types” section. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

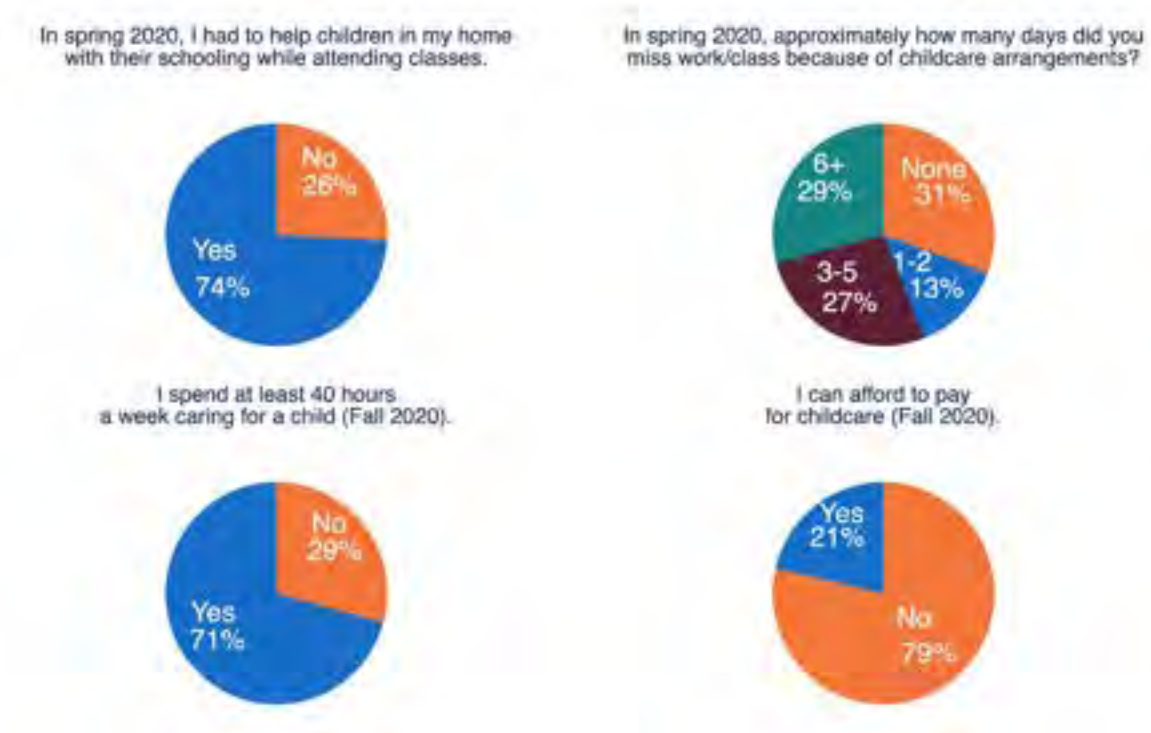
Families

Nationally, one-third of all Black students and two-in-five Black female students are parents.⁴² Black parenting students face among the highest levels of student debt because of the racial wealth gap, greater financial responsibilities for students with children, and inaccessible and inadequate financial aid.⁴³ About one-in-five HBCUs offer on-campus childcare for students’ children, a critical resource for

parenting students' success.⁴⁴ In an era of pandemic-related school and daycare closures, many parents across the country, especially mothers, spent more time on childcare.⁴⁵ Many parenting students at HBCUs navigated these responsibilities at the time they took the #RealCollege Survey, as did students caring for other members of their household.

Of the approximately 600 parenting students at HBCUs who participated in the survey (most of whom were female), 74% had to help a child in their home with school while attending classes in spring 2020 (Figure 5).⁴⁶ By fall 2020, 71% spent 40 hours or more each week caring for a child. For those who used or needed childcare, that service came with its own challenges. Approximately two-thirds of parenting students at HBCUs missed at least 1 day of work or class in spring 2020 because of childcare arrangements. Furthermore, only one-fifth of parenting students said that they could afford childcare. Parenting students at four-year MSIs and PBCCs generally experienced similar or slightly higher rates of these challenges compared to their peers at HBCUs (not shown; see [web appendices](#)).

FIGURE 5 | CHALLENGES FACED BY PARENTING STUDENTS AT HBCUs



Source | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

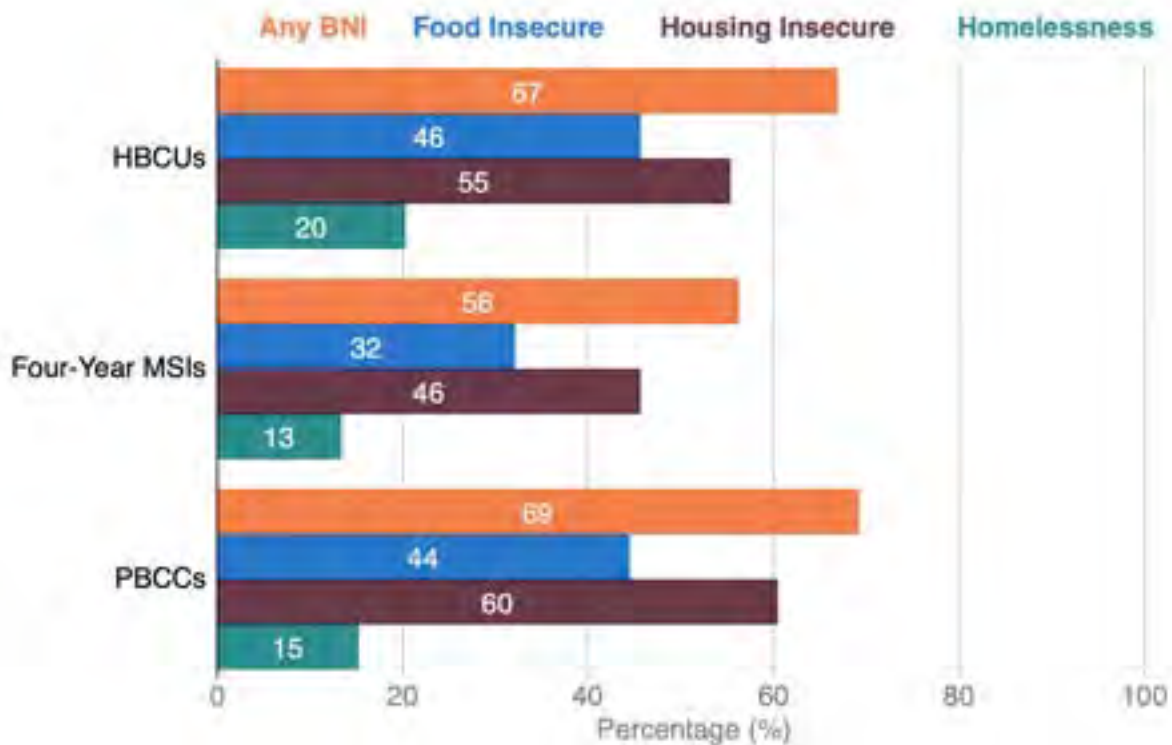
Notes | All results in this figure are among parenting students attending HBCUs, and results for questions about the spring 2020 term are limited to students who were enrolled in that term. Days absent due to childcare and childcare affordability are among those who reported that they need, use, or plan to use childcare. A parenting student is a parent, primary caregiver, or guardian (legal or informal) of any children in or outside their household. Cumulative percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY AT HBCUS

Amid heightened challenges, students at HBCUs struggled with basic needs insecurity—specifically food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness.⁴⁷ While few studies have investigated basic needs insecurity at HBCUs, existing research shows that rates of food insecurity at HBCUs are similar to or higher than those at other colleges and universities.⁴⁸ In a recent study focused on student debt, 44% of Black borrowers currently enrolled at HBCUs reported that they skipped meals because they didn't have enough money for food.⁴⁹ Often, students experiencing basic needs insecurity face difficult choices of which bills to pay—food or rent? Tuition or internet? In addition to students' wellbeing, basic needs insecurity affects academic success.⁵⁰ This section dives into the scope of basic needs insecurity at HBCUs and investigates which students are most likely to experience these challenges.

Two-thirds of the HBCU survey participants experienced at least one form of basic needs insecurity (Figure 6). Forty-six percent experienced food insecurity in the prior 30 days, 55% experienced housing insecurity in the past year, and 20% experienced homelessness in the past year. Students at HBCUs had higher rates of basic needs insecurity compared with their peers at four-year MSIs. Compared to students at PBCCs, students at HBCUs experienced food insecurity and homelessness slightly more often, yet experienced housing insecurity less often.

FIGURE 6 | BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY, BY INSTITUTION TYPE

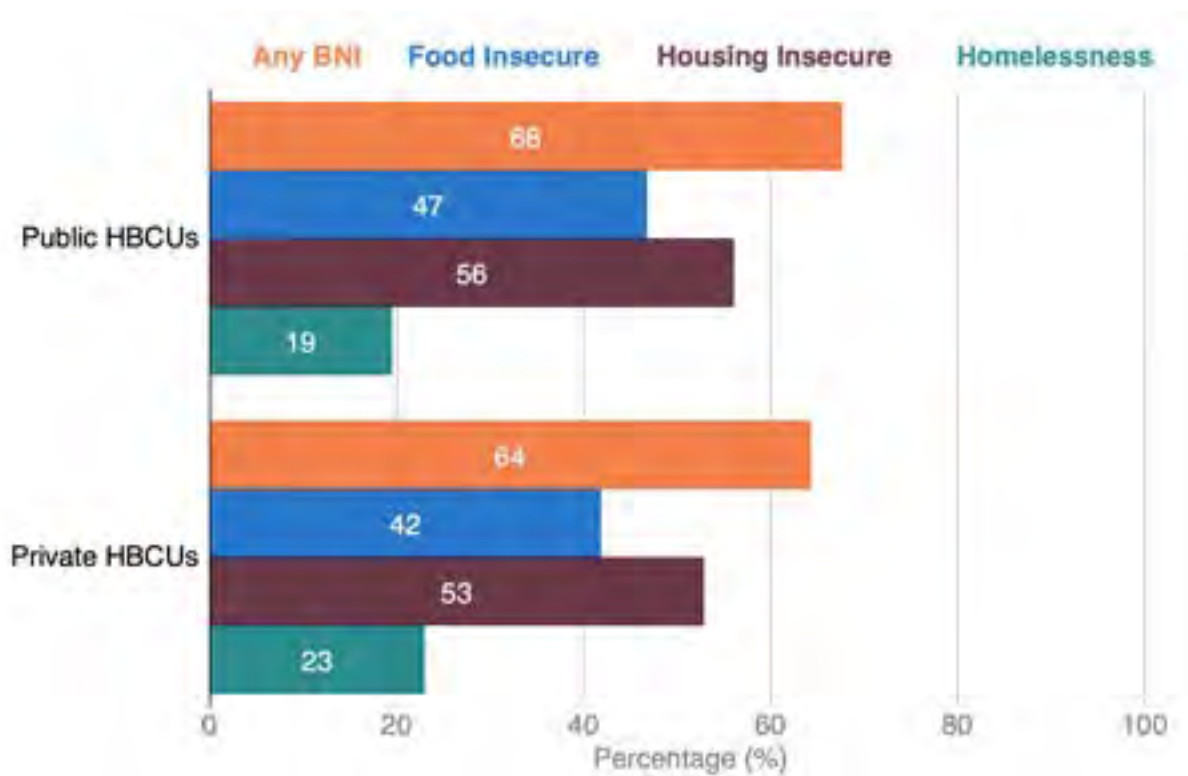


Source | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes | Students experiencing “any basic needs insecurity” is defined as students who experienced food insecurity in the past 30 days, or housing insecurity or homelessness within the last year. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was created, refer to the [web appendices](#). HBCUs = Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Four-Year MSIs = four-year Minority Serving Institutions that are not HBCUs, PBCCs = two-year Predominantly Black Institutions. For more information on institution types, refer to the “Defining Institution Types” section. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

Students attending public HBCUs experienced food insecurity and housing insecurity at higher rates than their peers at private HBCUs (Figure 7). For example, students at public HBCUs were more likely to skip a meal, worry that their food would run out before there was money to buy more, or not pay the full amount of their rent, mortgage, or utilities, compared to students at private HBCUs (not shown; see [web appendices](#)). Conversely, more students at private HBCUs experienced homelessness than those at public HBCUs. Consistent with past studies, the greatest share of students experiencing homelessness temporarily stayed with a friend or relative (not shown; see [web appendices](#)).⁵¹ At a time when campus closures affected college students throughout the country, 13% of public HBCU students and 16% of private HBCU students who participated in the survey had moved three or more times in the past year (not shown; see [web appendices](#)).⁵²

FIGURE 7 | BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY AT HBCUs, BY SECTOR

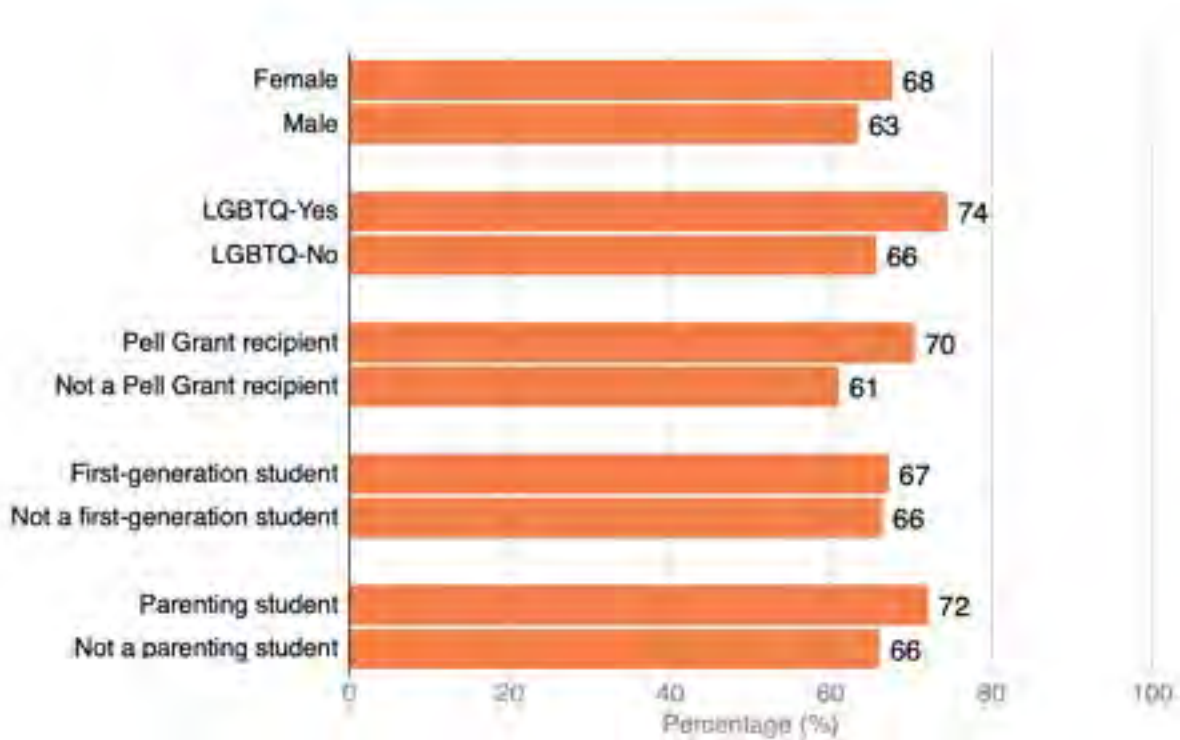


Source | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes | Students experiencing “any basic needs insecurity” is defined as students who experienced food insecurity in the past 30 days or housing insecurity or homelessness within the last year. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was created, refer to the [web appendices](#). Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

Basic needs insecurity disproportionately impacts specific populations of HBCU students. Female students experienced basic needs insecurity more often than male students (Figure 8). Similarly, LGBTQ students, students who receive a Pell Grant, and parenting students experienced basic needs insecurity more often than their peers who did not identify with those identities and experiences. Unlike at other institutions, we do not see a notable difference between the rates of basic needs insecurity for first-generation and continuing-generation students at HBCUs.⁵³ The rate of basic needs insecurity among students who do not receive a Pell Grant is also much higher at HBCUs than in past Hope Center work.⁵⁴

FIGURE 8 | DISPARITIES IN BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY AT HBCUs, BY GENDER, LGBTQ STATUS, PELL GRANT STATUS, FIRST GENERATION STATUS, AND PARENTING STATUS



Source | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes | Classifications of gender identity are not mutually exclusive. Students could self-identify with multiple classifications. Students who reported as self-identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, nonbinary/third gender, or preferred to self-describe their gender identity or sexual orientation are classified as LGBTQ. Students experiencing “any basic needs insecurity” were defined as students who experienced food insecurity in the past 30 days or housing insecurity or homelessness within the last year. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was created, refer to the [web appendices](#). Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

UTILIZATION OF SUPPORTS

HBCU students need well-resourced and accessible support programs. Even with resource constraints, their colleges and universities can begin to close the gap between students' needs and use of services. During the pandemic, HBCUs have used an influx of federal relief funding and philanthropic giving in creative ways to support students.⁵⁵ Fisk University distributed over \$500,000 in emergency aid to their students from the first two federal relief packages alone.⁵⁶ More than 20 HBCUs used federal relief funds to cover students' institutional account balances for tuition, fees, and room and board—balances that often must be paid to enroll for subsequent semesters.⁵⁷ Elizabeth City State University cleared unpaid balances for all student accounts from fall 2020 and spring 2021 semesters so that students who stopped out of college during the pandemic could re-enroll.⁵⁸ Delaware State University used funding from the federal Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) to pay off student debt for graduating seniors who faced financial hardship during the pandemic.⁵⁹ Other institutions, like Dillard University, Howard University, and North Carolina A&T State University used funds from private donors to support students with tuition and fees.⁶⁰ All colleges and universities, not only HBCUs or other MSIs, can learn from these practices.

This section reviews supports available to HBCU students experiencing basic needs insecurity in fall 2020.

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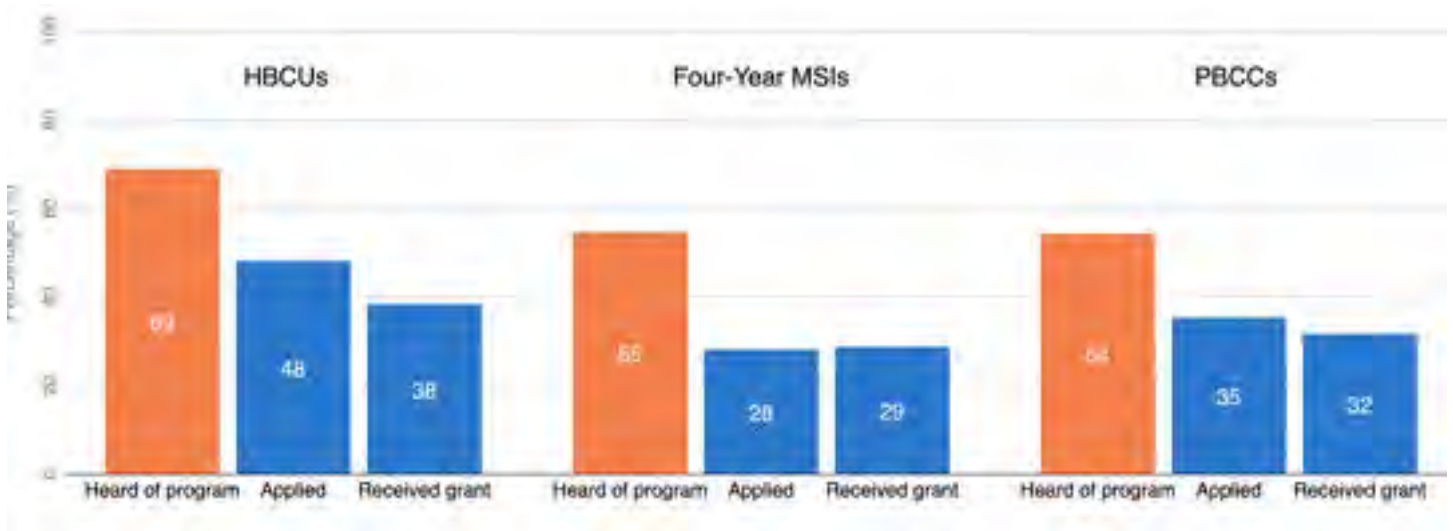
Emergency Aid

Emergency aid typically takes the form of small grants to help students with basic needs, such as rent, food, and other costs incurred because of unforeseen circumstances. The CARES Act, passed in March 2020, allocated \$14 billion to higher education institutions. Congress designated \$6 billion of that fund for emergency aid distributed directly to students.⁶¹



Over two-thirds of HBCU students experiencing basic needs insecurity knew about CARES emergency aid (Figure 9). Just under half of those aware of the program applied for a grant and 38% received one. Depending on how their institution distributed the aid, students did not always need to apply for emergency aid to receive it.⁶² More students at private HBCUs received CARES emergency aid than applied for it, while the opposite was true at public HBCUs (not shown; see [web appendices](#)). At all levels of interaction—hearing about it, applying for it, and receiving it—students at HBCUs who were experiencing basic needs insecurity engaged more with CARES emergency aid than their counterparts at four-year MSIs and PBCCs. The relatively high level of engagement is encouraging, though there is still room to grow.

FIGURE 9 | KNOWLEDGE OF, APPLICATION FOR, AND RECEIPT OF CARES ACT GRANTS AMONG STUDENTS EXPERIENCING BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY, BY INSTITUTION TYPE

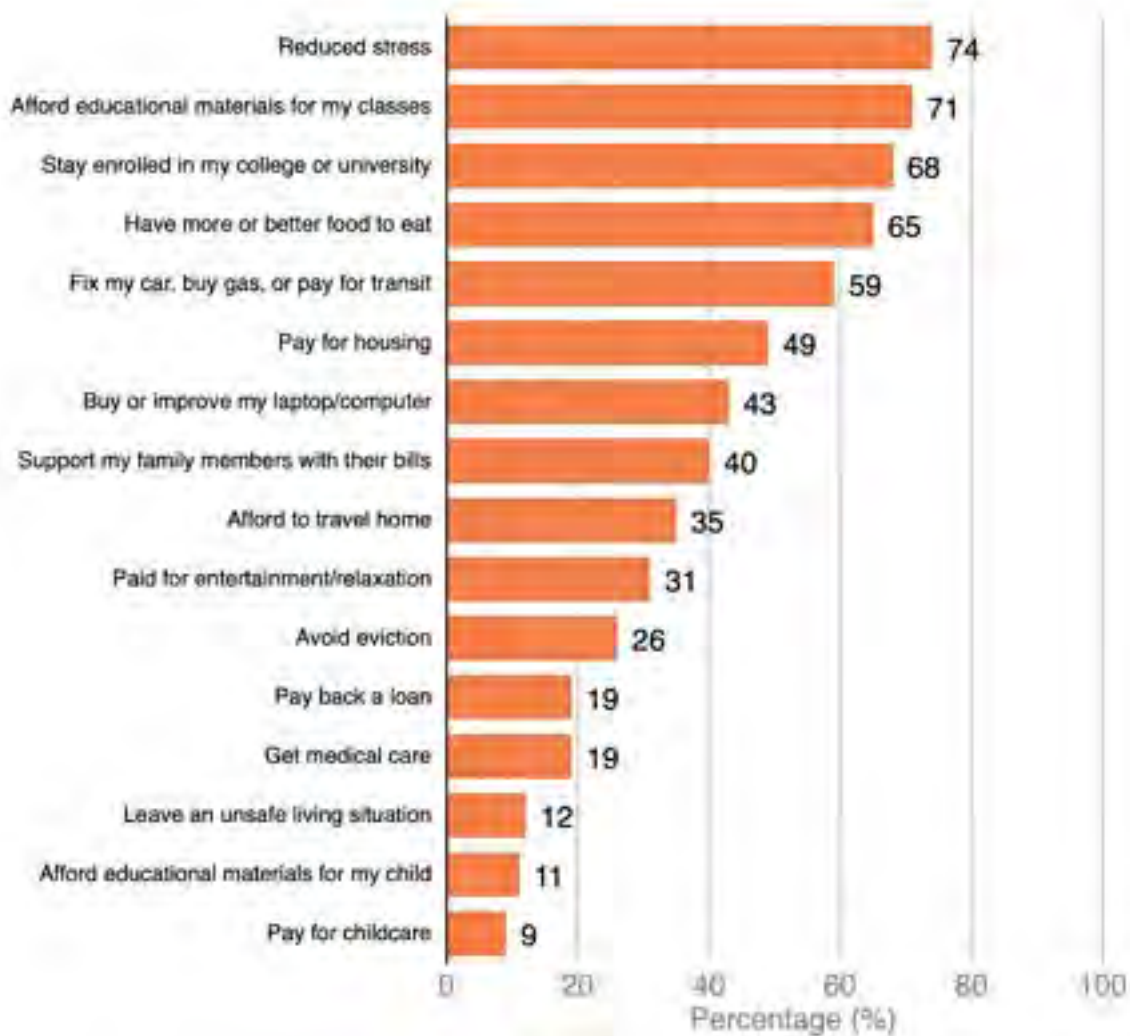


Source | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes | “Applied for” and “Received” are out of those who heard of CARES Emergency Aid. All are out of those experiencing basic needs insecurity. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was created, refer to the [web appendices](#). HBCUs = Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Four-Year MSIs = four-year Minority Serving Institutions that are not HBCUs, PBCCs = two-year Predominantly Black Institutions. For more information on institution types, refer to the “Defining Institution Types” section. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

For HBCU students who received emergency aid, the flexibility of the funds was critical. Over two-thirds of HBCU students who received emergency aid said the funds helped them to reduce stress, afford educational materials, and stay enrolled at their college or university (Figure 10). Many students, especially students at public HBCUs, used funds for food, transportation, or housing (public-private comparison not shown; see [web appendices](#)). Compared to their peers at four-year MSIs and PBCCs, students at HBCUs were more than twice as likely to use emergency aid to travel home (not shown; see [web appendices](#)). Many students needed to travel far when campuses shut down at the beginning of the pandemic, and some needed to go home to care for relatives infected with COVID-19 or grieve COVID-19-related deaths.

FIGURE 10 | TOP USES OF EMERGENCY AID FUNDING AMONG HBCU STUDENTS



Source | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

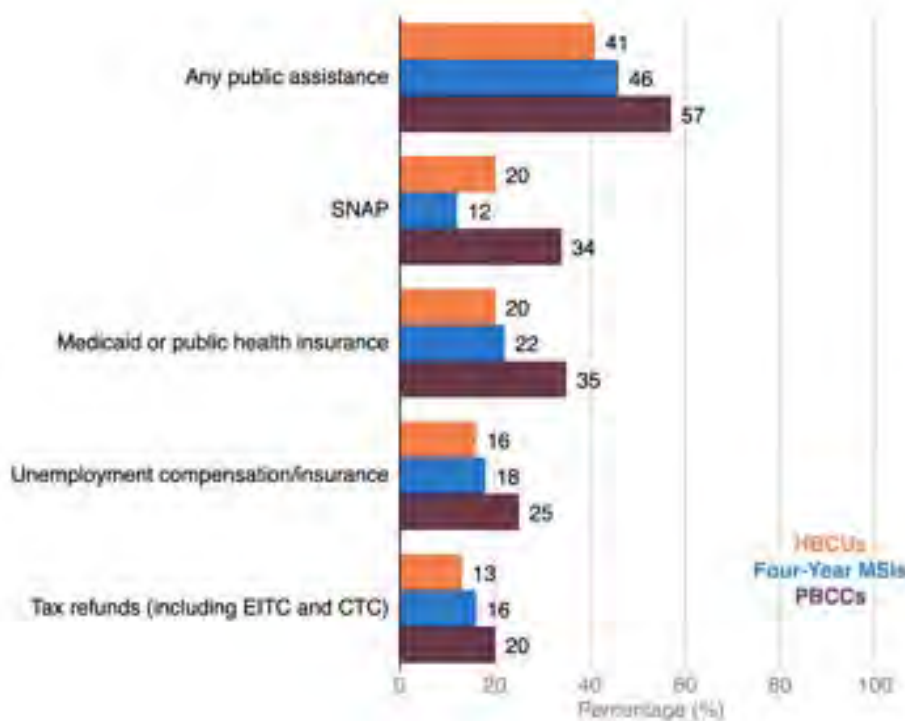
Notes | Results are among all HBCU respondents who received emergency aid, not only those experiencing basic needs insecurity. Students may have reported more than one use of emergency aid funding. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

Public Benefits

Public benefits provided by local, state, or federal government agencies provide essential support for students experiencing financial hardship. However, many public benefits (e.g., SNAP, Medicaid, and public housing) have strict eligibility criteria and complex application processes that put an undue burden on applicants—especially students.⁶³ These challenges restrict students’ access to support, and they are rooted in racist narratives, particularly about women of color.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, HBCUs have an opportunity to increase public benefits access for their students who meet eligibility criteria by raising awareness of benefits, providing referrals, and assisting with applications.

About two-in-five HBCU students with need accessed at least one public benefit (Figure 11). Students most frequently used Medicaid, SNAP, unemployment insurance, and tax refunds. More students at HBCUs utilized SNAP, an especially key support for alleviating food insecurity, than their counterparts at four-year MSIs.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, PBCCs had a far higher share of students with need enrolled in SNAP and/or Medicaid, compared to both HBCUs and four-year MSIs.

FIGURE 11 | USE OF PUBLIC BENEFITS AMONG STUDENTS EXPERIENCING BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY, BY INSTITUTION TYPE



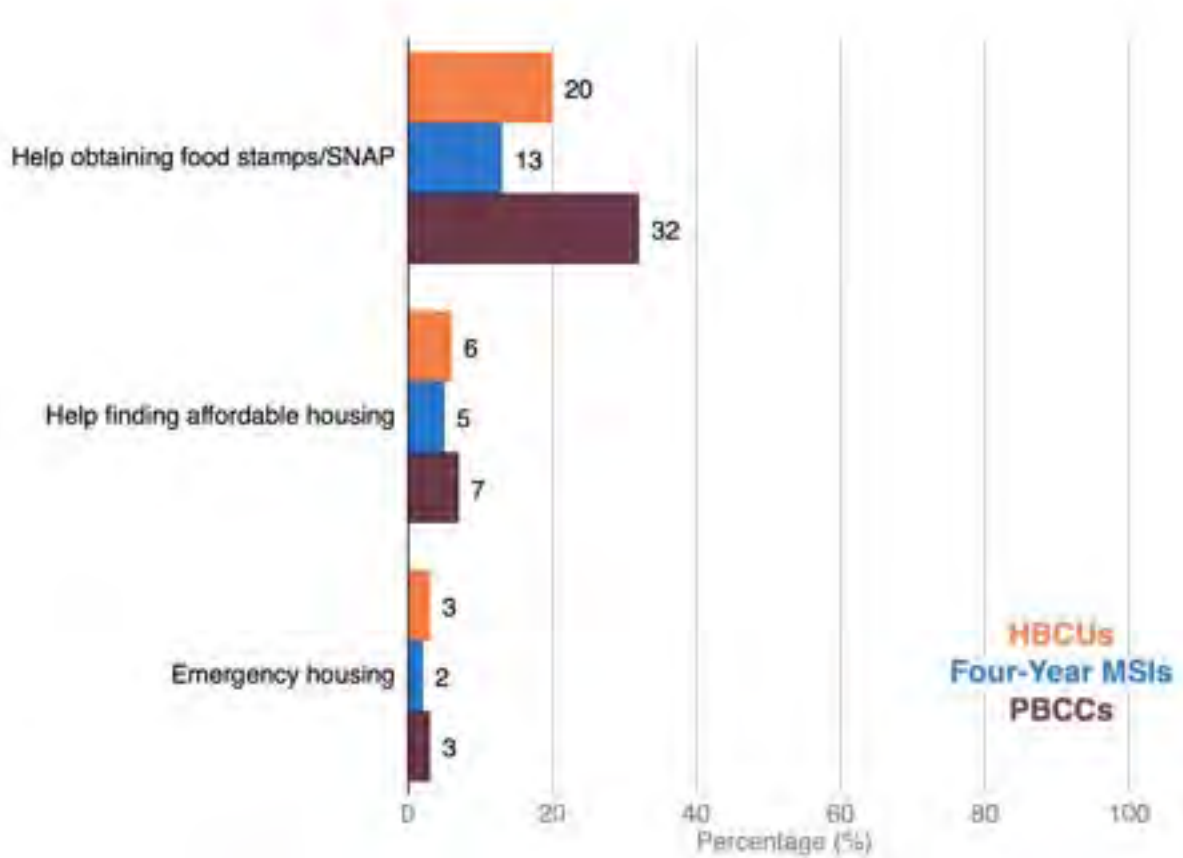
Source | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes | SNAP = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, EITC = Earned Income Tax Credit, CTC = Child Tax Credit. Students experiencing “basic needs insecurity” is defined as students who experienced food insecurity in the past 30 days, or housing insecurity or homelessness within the last year. For results on additional types of public benefits, as well as how measures of basic needs insecurity were created, see [web appendices](#). HBCUs = Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Four-Year MSIs = four-year Minority Serving Institutions that are not HBCUs, PBCCs = two-year Predominantly Black Institutions. For more information on institution types, refer to the “Defining Institution Types” section. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

Other Campus Supports

HBCU students experiencing basic needs insecurity did not often use other types of campus supports, which points to further opportunities for increased assistance. One-in-five HBCU students experiencing basic needs insecurity had help from their college applying for SNAP (Figure 12). Mirroring the patterns of SNAP utilization, HBCU students received help at a rate greater than four-year MSI students and a lower rate than PBCC students. Few students received help finding affordable housing or emergency housing from their college.

FIGURE 12 | USE OF CAMPUS SUPPORTS AMONG STUDENTS EXPERIENCING BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY, BY INSTITUTION TYPE

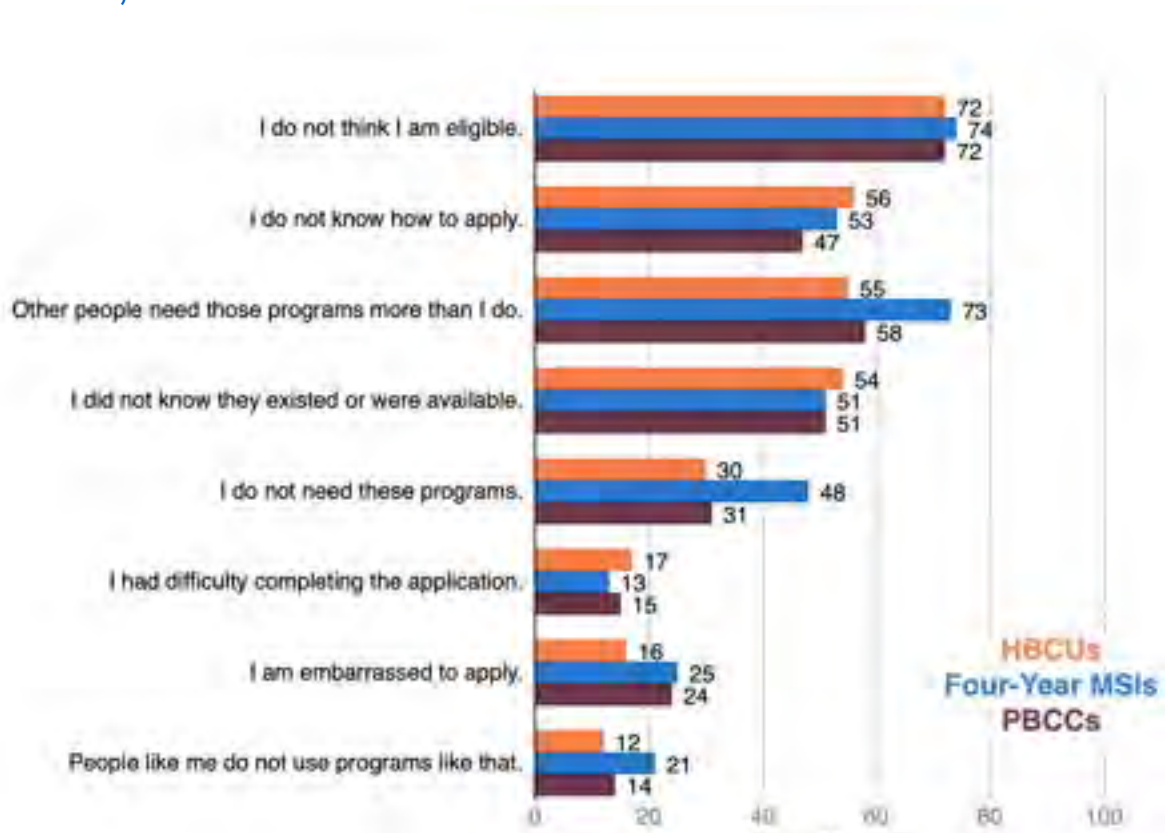


Source | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes | Students may have indicated uses of one or multiple campus supports. Rates of using supports are among students experiencing any basic needs insecurity; students experiencing “basic needs insecurity” is defined as students who experienced food insecurity in the past 30 days, or housing insecurity or homelessness within the last year. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was created, refer to the [web appendices](#). HBCUs = Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Four-Year MSIs = four-year Minority Serving Institutions that are not HBCUs, PBCCs = two-year Predominantly Black Institutions. For more information on institution types, refer to the “Defining Institution Types” section. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

HBCU students experiencing basic needs insecurity who did not utilize campus supports frequently believed they did not qualify (Figure 13). More than half simply did not know the supports existed or how to apply, while others believed that other people needed the supports more than they did. Students at HBCUs less often reported feeling embarrassed to seek out support than their peers at four-year MSIs or PBCCs. In other words, there seems to be less stigma associated with seeking out help at HBCUs compared to these other institutions, though stigma still impedes some students from seeking support.

FIGURE 13 | REASONS WHY STUDENTS EXPERIENCING BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY DID NOT USE CAMPUS SUPPORTS, BY INSTITUTION TYPE

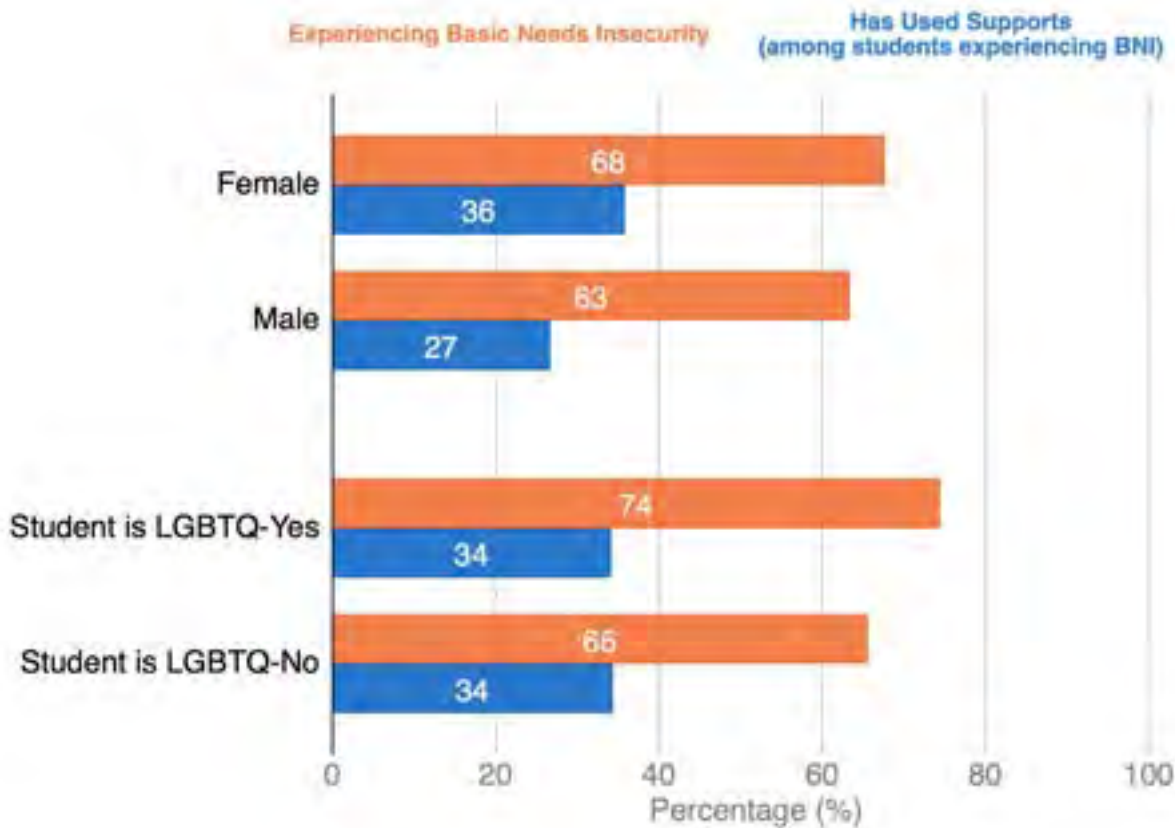


Source | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes | Students may have indicated one or more reasons for not using campus supports. Results are among students experiencing basic needs insecurity; students experiencing “basic needs insecurity” is defined as students who experienced food insecurity in the past 30 days, or housing insecurity or homelessness within the last year. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was created, refer to the [web appendices](#). HBCUs = Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Four-Year MSIs = four-year Minority Serving Institutions that are not HBCUs, PBCCs = two-year Predominantly Black Institutions. For more information on institution types, refer to the “Defining Institution Types” section. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

Just as certain groups of HBCU students experience basic needs insecurity more often than others, the data shows disparities in utilization of campus supports. Only 34% of the 74% of LGBTQ students experiencing basic needs insecurity utilized campus supports—a 40 percentage point gap between need and use (Figure 14). Non-LGBTQ students have a lower gap at 32 percentage points. Similarly, although male students experienced basic needs insecurity less often than female students, male students experienced a larger gap between need and use of supports (36 percentage points compared to 32 percentage points for female students).

FIGURE 14 | DISPARITIES IN GAPS BETWEEN BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY AND USE OF ANY CAMPUS SUPPORT AMONG HBCU STUDENTS, BY GENDER AND LGBTQ STATUS



Source | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes | Classifications of gender identity are not mutually exclusive. Students could self-identify with multiple classifications. Students experiencing “any basic needs insecurity” is defined as students who experienced food insecurity in the past 30 days or housing insecurity or homelessness within the last year. “Has used supports” refers to students utilizing one or more campus supports. Rates for utilization of supports are out of those experiencing any basic needs insecurity. For details on how basic needs insecurity measures were constructed, refer to the [web appendices](#). Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The data are clear: students at HBCUs face formidable pandemic-related challenges and struggle to fulfill their basic needs. Students need support in meeting these challenges to help them succeed in higher education and beyond. In turn, HBCUs need far greater resources and capacity to assist their students.

In November 2021, the House of Representatives passed the Build Back Better Act, which included nearly \$10 billion in funding for HBCUs, MSIs, and HSIs to strengthen academic and student supports, administrative and fiscal capabilities, research capacity, infrastructure development, and more.⁶⁶ Lawmakers included \$500 million for grants to states to develop and expand practices that improve student outcomes, including meeting student financial and basic needs.⁶⁷ At the time of writing, the legislation has not passed the Senate. However, both the Biden Administration and Congressional leaders have acknowledged the need to reinvest substantial resources into HBCUs and begin to correct for generations of racialized underfunding of these institutions.⁶⁸ They must go further.

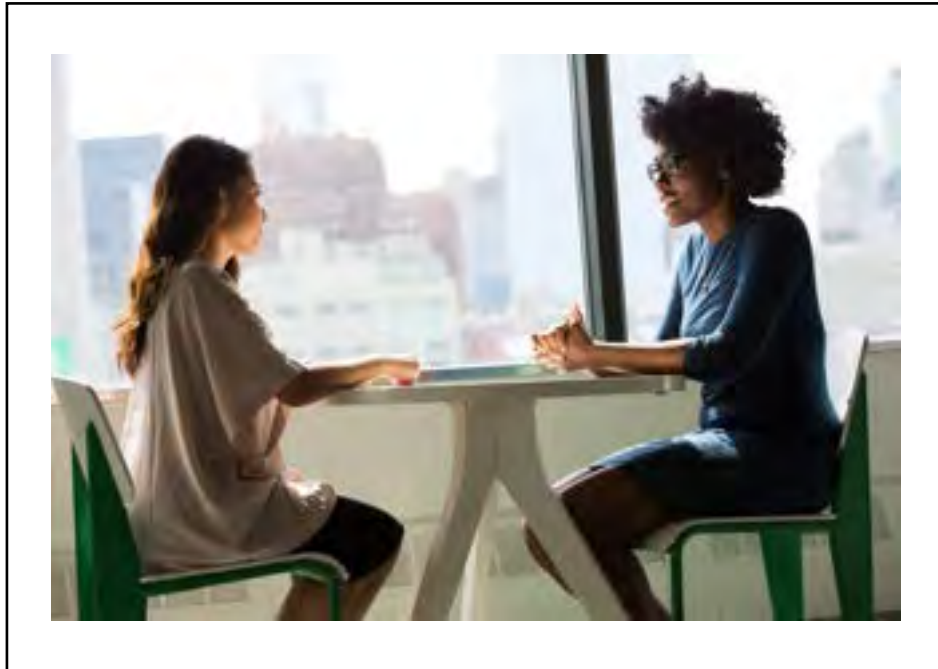
Recommendations For Federal Policymakers

1. Congress should expand funding for HBCUs through Title III programs and include public and private HBCUs in any federal-state partnership that plans to provide two years of tuition-free college.
2. Congress should expand funding for the newly created Basic Needs for Postsecondary Students Program, which provides competitive funding for HBCUs, MSIs, TCUs, and community colleges to build programs that address basic needs insecurity.⁶⁹
3. Federal policymakers should expand and make permanent emergency aid for students, expand SNAP benefits, and remove barriers and rules in other public benefit programs that prevent students from accessing resources to address their basic needs. See The Hope Center's [federal policy agenda](#) for additional recommendations to support the basic needs of students at HBCUs and beyond.

Recommendations for State Policymakers

1. States should increase funding for HBCUs, particularly HBCCs. Such investments are particularly important given historic and current disinvestment in HBCUs at the state as well as the federal level.⁷⁰
2. States should create and expand financial aid programs and emergency aid options for students attending HBCUs. The proposed [HBCU Opportunity Fund and related investments](#) in Virginia can serve as inspiration. So can state-level emergency aid programs like those in [Washington](#) and [Minnesota](#).
3. States should expand SNAP access by authorizing students in degree and non-degree career and technical programs at HBCCs, as well as HBCU students in programs that increase employability for low-income populations, to be eligible for SNAP benefits.

To support the sector, The Hope Center and the Center for the Study of HBCUs are launching [#RealCollegeHBCU](#), a capacity-building initiative. In its pilot phase, the initiative will support 10 HBCUs in building an ecosystem of basic needs supports. This will include training and coaching to help HBCUs secure additional financial resources, develop strategies for bridging gaps in student support, and sustain basic needs programs over time. We hope that with additional partners, this work will expand progressively to support the full sector.



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- Dr. Danette Howard, Senior Vice President and Chief Policy Officer, Lumina Foundation and Executive in Residence, University of Southern California Race & Equity Center
- Angela Sanchez, Senior Program Manager, Jobs for the Future
- Dr. Crystal DeGregory, Research Fellow, Center for Historic Preservation at Middle Tennessee State University and Executive Director, HBCUStory
- Ciara Terry, Spelman College undergraduate and member of The Hope Center's Student Leadership Advisory Council
- Destney Johnson, Grambling State University undergraduate
- Marco Flores, Paul Quinn College undergraduate and member of The Hope Center's Student Leadership Advisory Council
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About The Hope Center

[The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice at Temple University](#) is redefining what it means to be a student-ready college, with a national movement centering #RealCollege students' basic needs. Food, affordable housing, transportation, childcare, and mental health are central conditions for learning. Without those needs being met, too many students leave college in debt and/or without a degree.

To learn more about many of the report's authors, visit hope4college.com/team/. For media inquiries, contact Editorial Director, Nicole Hacker, at nicole.hacker@temple.edu.

About the Center for the Study of HBCUs

The [Center for the Study of Historically Black Colleges and Universities \(HBCUs\) at Virginia Union University](#) is a national research center with a broad outreach mission focused on the strength and sustainability of HBCUs. Our mission is achieved through four primary activities: conducting research and scholarship, convening the HBCU scholarly community, mobilizing resources, and disseminating research and scholarship broadly. The Center is dedicated to basic, applied, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research, and scholarly publications with the purpose of sharing information and adding to the body of scholarly knowledge.

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⁶¹ We focus on the CARES Act because it was the only federal relief funding available at the time the survey was fielded in fall 2020, but additional funding has since been distributed to higher education institutions through the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021 and the American Rescue Plan Act. See: [CARES Act](#), H.R.748, 116th Cong. (2020); U.S. Department of Education. (2021, August). [CRRSAA: Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund \(HEERF II\)](#); U.S. Department of Education. (2021b, September). [ARP: American Rescue Plan \(HEERF III\)](#).

⁶² Goldrick-Rab, S., Hacker, N.L., Kienzl, G., Price, D.V., & Curtis, D. (2021, October). [When care isn't enough: Scaling emergency aid during the pandemic](#). The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice.

⁶³ Lowrey, A. (2021, July 27). [The time tax](#). The Atlantic; The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice. (2021b). [#RealCollege federal policy agenda: 2021](#).

⁶⁴ Dickinson, 2021; Meyer & Floyd, 2020; Allen, 2020; Minoff, 2020.

⁶⁵ In December 2020, Congress also expanded student eligibility for SNAP benefits to those who have a \$0 Expected Family Contribution (EFC) or are eligible to participate in a federal or state work-study program, potentially increasing the number of students eligible for SNAP by 3 million. See: [Consolidation Appropriations Act](#), H.R.133, 116th Cong. (2021); Granville, P. (2021, February 2). [Congress made 3 million college students newly eligible for SNAP food aid. Here's what must come next](#). The Century Foundation.

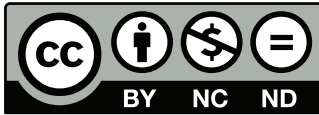
⁶⁶ [Build Back Better Act](#). H.R.5376. 117th Cong. (2021).

⁶⁷ Build Back Better Act, 2021.

⁶⁸ The White House. (2021, October 9). [Fact sheet: The Biden-Harris Administrations' historic investments and support for Historically Black Colleges and Universities](#); United States Congresswoman Alma Adams. (2021, May 10). [Rep. Adams' landmark HBCU legislation receives warm welcome in Washington](#).

⁶⁹ U.S. Department of Education. (2021c, November 5). [Applications for new awards; Basic needs for postsecondary students program](#). Federal Register.

⁷⁰ Harris, 2021.



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