

Measuring food and housing insecurity

This brief describes the survey questions and definitions of food and housing insecurity used in the University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES) and the University of California Graduate Student Experience Survey (UCGSES).

Food insecurity

The UCUES and UCGSES asks students to self-report their food security status. Prior to 2016, UCUES included only one question asking whether students skipped meals to save money. The 2016 survey included a two-item module to evaluate students' food security status. The 2018 survey replaced the two-item module with a six-item module developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The six-item module distinguishes between low and very low food security (combined to identify students experiencing food insecurity), while the two-item module can only be used to identify students experiencing food insecurity.

Two-item module in UCUES 2016

For the following statements, please say whether the statement was *often true*, *sometimes true*, or *never true* for you in the last 12 months.

1. I was worried whether my food would run out before I got more.
2. The food that I bought just didn't last, and I didn't have money to get more.

Food insecurity was defined as an affirmative response to either or both of the two food insecurity questions.

Six-item module in UCUES 2018 to present

For the following statements, please say whether the statement was *often true*, *sometimes true*, or *never true* for you in the last 12 months.

1. The food that I bought just didn't last, and I didn't have money to get more.
2. I couldn't afford to eat balanced meals.

For the following statements, please select yes or no for you in the last 12 months.

3. Did you ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?
4. Did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?
5. Were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?

(If "yes" is selected to Question 3) You indicated that you had cut the size of your meals or skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food.

6. How often did this happen – *almost every month*, *some months but not every month*, or *in only 1 or 2 months*?

Food security was defined based on the sum of scores. An affirmative response of "*often true*" or "*sometimes true*" to each of Questions 1 and 2 or "*yes*" to each of Questions 4 to 5 each add one point to the score. If "*yes*" is selected for Question 3, then "*almost every month*" or "*some months but not every month*" as responses to Question 6 add two points to the score, while a response of "*in only one or two months*" to

Question 6 adds one point to the score. Then, three levels of food security were defined.

- **FOOD SECURITY:** Raw scores of 0-1 indicate high or marginal food security, referred to generally as “food security.”
- **LOW FOOD SECURITY:** Raw scores of 2-4 indicate low food security, which is characterized by reduced quality, variety or desirability of the diet.
- **VERY LOW FOOD SECURITY:** Raw scores of 5-6 indicate very low food security, which is characterized by disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.
- Low food security and very low food security are combined to represent ***Food Insecurity***.

Housing insecurity

The UCUES and UCGSES asks students to self-report their housing security status. Unlike food security, there is no national standard of determining housing insecurity status. The questions currently used to measure homelessness or housing insecurity in UC student experience surveys are based on the McKinney-Vento Homelessness Assistance Act definition of homelessness for children and youth, or “individuals who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence.”

One item module in UCUES 2018 and prior

Since attending UC, have you ever been homeless for any of the following lengths of time (check all that apply)? (Homeless means not having stable or reliable housing, e.g., living on the street, in vehicles, motels, campgrounds, single-occupancy facilities, or couch surfing in other people’s homes for temporary sleeping arrangements).

1. No
2. Yes, during Fall-Spring academic year
3. Yes, during Summer when taking classes
4. Yes, during Summer when not taking classes
5. Yes, during Winter break

Homelessness/housing insecurity was defined as not having stable or reliable housing during any time point during the school year. In other words, a student would be considered as homeless if any of the five “Yes, ...” choices was selected.

Nine item module in UCUES 2020 to present

In 2020, the question module was expanded to nine items related to homelessness and housing insecurity:

1. Where are you living this term?
 - Campus residence hall
 - Campus owned apartment or house (on- or off-campus)
 - Sorority or fraternity
 - Co-op student housing

- Off-campus in an apartment
- Off-campus in a house
- No stable residence/Homeless
- Other, please elaborate _____

2. How far do you live from campus this term?

- On campus or < 1 mile
- 1 mile to 2 miles
- 3 miles to 10 miles
- 11 to 20 miles
- 21 miles or more

Q3. With whom do you live? Please select the option that best describes your living situation this term.

- I live alone
- I share an apartment, house, or residence hall room with at least one other UC [CAMPUS NAME] student
- I share an apartment or house with people who are not UC {e://Field/CAMPUS} students
- I live with at least one family member
- I am a single parent living with children
- I live with my spouse or domestic partner and children
- I live with my spouse or domestic partner without children
- Other, please elaborate _____

4. In the last 12 months, have you slept overnight in any of the following places because you didn't have a permanent home to return to? (Check all that apply)

- Temporarily staying with a relative, friend, or couch surfing until you found other housing
- Temporarily on campus in libraries, offices, or other non-residential university spaces
- Temporarily at a hotel or motel without a permanent home to return to (not on vacation or business travel)
- Temporarily in an Airbnb, HomeAway or similar without a permanent home to return to (not on vacation or business travel)
- In transitional housing or independent living program
- At a group home such as a halfway house or residential program
- At a treatment center (such as detox, hospital, etc.)
- At a homeless shelter
- Outdoor location such as street, sidewalk, or alley, bus or train stop, campground or woods, park, beach, or riverbed, under bridge or overpass (not for recreation or leisure)
- In a closed area/space with a roof not meant for human habitation such as car or truck, van, RV or camper, encampment or tent, abandoned building, or unconverted garage (not for recreation or leisure)
- In a living room or another space not originally intended for habitation (i.e., closet, attic, basement, converted garage) in a house or apartment

5. How many times have you moved from one residence to another in the last 12 months?

6. In the last 12 months, which of the following were reasons why you moved? (Check all that apply)

- Financial difficulty (couldn't afford housing or rent, raised rent)
- Landlord's reason (selling the property, etc.)
- Landlord problems (difficulty communicating, does not make timely repairs)
- Contract/lease ended

Got off a waiting list and got housing
Roommate problems (noisy, dirty, etc.)
Other, please elaborate: _____

7. In the last 12 months, have you ever lacked a safe, regular, and adequate nighttime place to stay and sleep for any of the following lengths of time? (Check all that apply) Note: Not having a safe, adequate nighttime place to stay includes sleeping in vehicles, motels, campgrounds, homeless shelters, single-occupancy facilities, or couches in other people's homes because you had nowhere else to go.

No

Yes, during Fall academic term

Yes, during Winter academic term

Yes, during Winter break

Yes, during Spring academic term

Yes, during Spring break

Yes, during Summer when taking classes

Yes, during Summer when not taking classes

Yes, during other academic holidays (such as Thanksgiving or MLK day)

Yes, but I cannot recall when it occurred

8. In the last 12 months, were you ever at risk of not having a safe, regular, and adequate nighttime place to stay and sleep while you were on a UC housing waiting list?

Yes

No

9. In the last 12 months, how often did each of these things happen to you because you were worried about paying for housing?

a. You experienced anxiety

b. You experienced depression

c. You skipped meals

d. You ate less nutritious and/or balanced meals

e. You had difficulty focusing on your studies

Every month

Some months during the year

1 or 2 times in the year

Never