



The State of Student Basic Needs

San Francisco State University

Basic needs are the conditions and resources necessary to survive and thrive. Food, shelter and sleep are foundational components students need to reach their full potential at SF State. Due to increasing cost of education, rising costs of living and reduction in federal financial aid, these necessities have become unattainable for many students. According to a 2018 study, 49% of SF State students surveyed reported being food insecure and 18% reported homelessness in the past nine months (Crutchfield & McGuire, 2018).

Financial Crisis

In today's economic climate, students are navigating the demands of higher education while facing extreme financial burden. Financial strain is the most significant reason students do not return to SF State after their first year. In 2017, 49% of SF State students who did not return after completing their first year cited financial concerns and the high cost of living as the primary reason (Yoo, 2019). In 2019 another study found 56% of SF State students reported financial hardship, while over 60% of those described housing as the most significant challenge (Rankin and Associates, 2019).

"So, it really boils down to heightened financial pressures when you live off-campus. Because everything costs money, even just to get to campus...You might sacrifice eating to put gas in your car. You know what I'm saying? I've heard students say that before that, you know, I didn't eat today because I need gas to get to class...(Wolin, 2019)"

Financial aid is failing to cover the cost of attending college, often times only covering tuition. This leaves students with the large financial burden of covering high living expenses (Crutchfield & McGuire, 2019).

Housing Insecurity

SF State has limited on-campus housing, in Fall 2017 only 12% of students lived on-campus (Office of Institutional Research, 2019). As a result, most students are forced to rely on a housing market with extremely high rental costs and a shortage of affordable housing. Thirty-seven percent of SF State students surveyed reported they were not confident they could pay their rent on time, and 11% had been evicted in the past six months (Crutchfield & McGuire 2018). Furthermore historically marginalized students, such as African Americans, low income and first-generation hold a higher burden of housing crisis (Crutchfield & McGuire 2018). The high cost of living in San Francisco has priced many students out of the market, forcing them to live in vehicles, on couches, in shelters, or to move further and further away from campus. For many students who struggle to afford the cost of living in the Bay Area, commuting from more affordable, distant communities, unreachable by public transit is their only option. Even if students are able to secure more affordable rent in distant communities, gas, tolls, parking and other transportation costs reduce student's already marginal budgets.

Food Insecurity

As students face the ongoing challenge of balancing their educational and living expenses, many have limited to no disposable income left over to pay for food. Students report skipping meals, not eating daily, not having enough food and not having enough resources to get the food they need. (Crutchfield & McGuire 2018).

Impacts

A lack of food or stable housing can have lasting impacts on a student's ability to achieve their educational goals. Students facing food and housing insecurity are at a heightened risk for negative mental and physical health outcomes, including chronic illness and have higher rates of discontinuing school. (Crutchfield & McGuire 2018).

Conclusion

SF State students are resilient, outstanding achievers, many of whom are first generation students from low-income backgrounds. They, alongside of their families, have made enormous sacrifices to get to college in hopes of earning a degree and achieving upward mobility. SF State, along with community partners, must make every effort to ensure food or housing insecurity is not the reason a student is forced to abandon their educational dreams.

References

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