

Homelessness and Food & Housing Insecurity among NC State Students

Part 1: Third Wave Data Report

Part 2: Recommendations

March 2024

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PART 1: Data Report

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Increasing Basic Needs Security among NC State Students:

March 2024

A New Call to Action

For the third time since 2017, NC State undergraduate and graduate students participated in a survey about their experiences with food and housing security, their use of basic needs resources on campus, and their general wellbeing. The **results indicate a consistent, notable increase in rates of food and housing insecurity among our students**. In 2017, survey rates of food insecurity (15%) and homelessness (9.5%) were alarming. These figures prompted sizable financial support from individual donors and responses from DASA as well as Departmental and College units. However, student need spiked during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the 2020 rates of student food insecurity and homelessness climbing to 23% and 15% respectively.

Since the original study in 2017, dedicated groups within NC State have worked to address basic needs insecurity by providing direct resources to students, increasing collaboration with on- and off-campus partners, and striving to achieve a campus environment in which all students have access to nutritious food and affordable housing.



8,000+ Pack Essentials applications since 2020



\$2 million in direct financial support to students since COVID



4,500+ dining hall meals donated in 2022-2023



12,000+ visits to the Feed the Pack Food Pantry in 2023

Despite this flood of basic needs resources available to students from 2020 to the present, our **students continue to face basic needs insecurity at disconcerting rates**. In 2023, student food insecurity grew to 30%. While rates of homelessness remained stable at 14%, 11.3% of students also experienced housing insecurity. Of the students experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity, 6.9% relied on temporary housing, such as staying with friends; 1.9% resided in hotels or motels without permanent housing to return to; and 2.0% lived in outdoor spaces, such as overpasses, bus stops and alleyways. Importantly, students experiencing food and housing insecurity were more likely to also face poor well-being. (View the [full report here.](#))

As programs like Pack Essentials continue offering direct assistance to students, they must be supported by systemic changes across the university. **We strongly encourage the university to**

promptly act on the recommendations provided in the next section. Our students deserve innovative and bold actions that will address growing basic needs insecurity in our NC State community.

Recommended Actions

The continued growth in food and housing insecurity among NC State's student populations requires an urgent, comprehensive, and systems-level response. The following are targeted recommendations that bolster the ongoing efforts downstream to address student needs with systemic solutions that will provide impact at the student population level. These recommendations provide an upstream expansion of the [Call to Action](#) proposed in 2019.

1 Designate a Vice Chancellor or Assistant Vice Chancellor to lead efforts to increase food and housing security.

- This role would demonstrate the centrality of student basic needs as a priority for the university while capitalizing on current university initiatives, including the newest Strategic Plan, the Physical Master Plan of 2023, and the Wellness Task Force Report.

2 Consider the impact of university policies and practices.

- Enrollment growth should be preceded by comparable increases in available university-owned student housing.
- Rising costs of living across Wake County should correspond with an increased Cost of Attendance (COA) such that students can realistically prepare for anticipated costs.
- Evaluation of the impact of the residency requirement on student success and housing security of non-freshmen is strongly encouraged.
- A salary study of student workers, including graduate student research/ teaching assistantships and work study positions, is recommended alongside regular cost of living adjustments for student workers.
- Students with \$0 Expected Family Contribution (EFC) should be assisted in applying for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and the university should encourage Congress to change restrictive SNAP benefits policies that limit student eligibility.

3 Deepen partnerships with local affordable housing and basic needs initiatives.

- As a land-grant institution, NC State should leverage and build partnerships with public and private entities focused on affordable housing in our community. This work should be led by an upper-level administrator in collaboration with city and county partnerships.

4 Expand existing partnerships to include student basic needs.

- Appropriate campus offices should connect with NC State employer partners to propose an expansion of subsidized student housing programs to include all students willing to work in part-time positions throughout the academic year and summer terms.
- Numerous nonprofit organizations with links to NC State have expressed interest in addressing basic needs insecurity amongst our student population. NC State should pursue partnerships with organizations that demonstrate a commitment to measurably increasing basic needs security for our students.

PART 1

Homelessness and food & housing insecurity among NC State students: Third wave, 2023

Background

Over the past decade there has been mounting national concern about the scale and impact of food insecurity and homelessness among college students. A large investigation of four-year U.S. colleges conducted prior to the COVID pandemic indicated that 36% of undergraduate university students (range of 15%- 60% across sites) reported being food insecure in the prior 30 days and 9% of the students (range of 5% - 15% across sites) had been homeless in the prior 12 months (Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, Schneider, Hernandez, & Cady, 2018). In fall of 2017 at our institution, nearly 15% of students had been food insecure in the prior 30 days and 9.6% had been homeless in the 12 months preceding the survey (Haskett, Majumder, Kotter- Grünh, & Gutierrez, 2020; Haskett, Kotter-Gruhn, & Majumder, 2020).

In March 2020, the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic as COVID-19 spread internationally at a rapid pace. With little notice, university campuses closed to slow the spread of COVID-19. Campus closures resulted in loss of students' on-campus jobs or reductions in their work hours, causing economic strain for many students. Residence hall closures disrupted many students' living situations as well as their access to meal plans. There were interruptions to resources that students relied on for essential needs such as food pantries and health/mental health services. These events left many students who lacked financial security at risk of food insecurity and homelessness. Haskett and Dorris (2022) conducted a second student survey on basic needs in October, 2020, seven months into the pandemic. Results showed that 15% of NC State students had experienced homelessness in the past seven months and 23% had been food insecure in the prior 30 days. Our local findings were consistent with national statistics reported by the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice (Goldrick-Rab, Coca, Kienzl, Welton, Dahl, & Magnelia, 2020) during a similar time frame. [The National Postsecondary Student Aid Study \(NPSAS\)](#) reported by the NCES was conducted just as the pandemic began to disrupt lives in March 2020. At that time 34.5% of undergraduates and 20.8% of graduate students had been food insecure in the prior 30 days; 8% of undergraduate and 5% of graduate students had experienced recent (past 30 days) homelessness.

It is reasonable to speculate that rates of food insecurity and homelessness among college students increased from 2017 to 2020 because of the major disruption of the pandemic. It was anticipated that students would need financial support during and immediately following the pandemic, and resources certainly did flow. For example,

from the 2019-2020 school year through 2021-2022, NC State students received significant emergency financial support via the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) provided in response to the pandemic. According to the NC State financial aid office, the amount of aid given was almost \$9M in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021, and the amount was \$28M in 2021-2022. These funds were issued directly to students for food, housing, technology, childcare, medical fees and other expenses related to the campus disruption due to COVID. NC State also allocated more than \$1M of the institutional portion of the HEERF relief funds for indirect student financial support; NC State used those funds to cover students' unpaid prior term charges incurred during the semesters included in the COVID emergency declaration to ease students' ability to re-enroll or obtain a transcript if needed.

According to the campus food pantry leadership, Feed the Pack changed tremendously during and following the pandemic. Some of the most impactful changes included becoming a partner agency with the regional food bank, shifting from exclusively nonperishable foods to providing fresh produce and perishable items, and expanding retail grocery store recovery pickups. Staffing also transitioned from volunteer leadership roles to paid student internships; in spring 2024 the pantry will employ 14 student leaders. Since 2020, Feed the Pack has had 38,240 visits (including students and staff members) and distributed over 573,000 pounds of food. A record amount of food was distributed in January 2024.

It might be expected that the influx of financial resources and food available in the pantry would reduce basic needs insecurity from the very high rates obtained in the 2020 survey. However, there were several factors operating that might contribute to sustained high rates of food and housing insecurity despite the influx of resources. Specifically, the cost of living in the past several years has risen, the minimum wage in NC has remained stagnant, there has been a dramatic loss of affordable housing supply in the local community, and there has been an increase in the student population at NC State with no meaningful increase in on-campus student housing units.

The aim of the current study was to measure the scale of homelessness as well as food and housing insecurity among NC State students in October 2023 to inform efforts to address basic needs insecurity among our student population. In addition, there was interest in the degree to which rates of food insecurity and homelessness varied by student identities. Given significant concerns about the mental health of NC State students (e.g., a university-wide [mental health task force](#) was launched in fall 2022), another aim was to measure the connection between students' food and housing insecurity and their well-being. A final goal was to understand students' use of services and resources available on and off campus and the degree to which students shared their own personal resources with others.

Method

Data collection occurred during the month of October, the same month of data collection in 2017 and 2020. The university research office provided email addresses for 8,055 students (approx. 25% of the student population) selected to be representative of the student body in terms of race, gender, and degree-seeking status (undergraduate/graduate). An email invitation to complete the survey was sent to the 8,055 potential participants. If students wanted to participate, they clicked a link that provided a full explanation of the study and informed consent information. Students who consented to participate began the survey. Completion of the survey required approximately 7 minutes. At the end of the survey, students could enter a drawing for an e-gift card by providing their email address (unlinked to their survey responses). The response rate to this survey was 18%; in 2017 the response rate was 28% and in 2020 the rate was 18%. Procedures were approved by the university IRB.

Participants

A total of 1,439 students participated in the study. In terms of demographic characteristics (Table 1), the sample of students generally was representative of the student body, but as in prior surveys of our students and consistent with surveys on other campuses, female students were over-represented.

Table 1

Student Profile – Demographic Characteristics

	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
Gender Identity (<i>n</i> = 1305)		
Female	738	56.5%
Male	517	39.6%
Nonbinary (including gender neutral, agender, pangender)	50	3.8%
Race (<i>n</i> = 1290)		
American Indian or Alaska Native	9	0.7%
Asian	288	22.3%
Black or African American	70	5.4%
Middle Eastern or Arab	14	1.1%
Multiracial	75	5.8%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	2	0.2%
White	797	61.8%
Other	35	2.7%
Ethnicity (<i>n</i> = 1301)		
Hispanic or Latino or Spanish origin	117	9%
Not Hispanic or Latino or Spanish origin	1184	91%
Sexual Identity^a (<i>n</i> = 1299)		
Heterosexual or straight	988	76%
LGBTQIA+	311	24%
Age (<i>M</i>=22.36; <i>SD</i> = 5.63; range = 18-60 years) (<i>n</i> = 1279)		

Under 25	1007	78.7%
25 to 34	220	17.2%
35 and older	52	4.1%

^a To avoid low cell sizes in subsequent analyses, several categories were combined. A more fine-grained report of sexual identity is available from the author.

With respect to academic characteristics of the sample (Table 2), the majority of students were working toward their Bachelor's degree (69.5%) and had been enrolled at NC State for more than a year. The largest percentage of students were in the College of Engineering (33.9%) and very few were in the College of Veterinary Medicine (0.6%). These participation rates were comparable to student enrollment percentages in the various colleges of NC State in fall, 2023.

Table 2

Student Profile – Academic-Related Characteristics

	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
Degree Sought (<i>n</i> = 1435)		
Bachelor's degree	1000	69.5%
Master's degree	218	15.2%
Doctoral degree	217	15.3%
Length of time attending NCSU (<i>n</i> = 1436)		
In first year at NC State.	524	36.5%
Enrolled at NC State for more than a year.	912	63.5%
College enrolled in (<i>n</i> = 1435)		
Agriculture and Life Sciences	157	10.9%
Design	44	3.1%
Education	60	4.2%
Engineering	488	33.9%
The Graduate School	53	3.7%
Humanities and Social Sciences	205	14.2%
Management	93	6.5%
Natural Resources	80	5.6%
Sciences	163	11.3%
Textiles	43	3.0%
University College (Undeclared majors)	41	2.8%
Veterinary Medicine	8	0.6%

Measure

Survey items were borrowed from Crutchfield and McGuire (2017) and were consistent with the 2017 and 2020 surveys administered at NC State. See Appendix A for survey items.

Food security. To measure food security, the USDA's Household/Individual Food Security Survey Module (FSSM) 6-item version was used, with a 30-day timeframe (Blumberg, Bialostosky, Hamilton, & Briefel, 1999). Based on participants' responses, they were classified into one of three categories. Those who provided 0-1 affirmative responses to the FSSM items were considered Food Secure, students with scores of 2-4 were considered Low Food Secure, and those with scores of 5-6 were considered Very Low Food Secure. Students who were Low Food Secure or Very Low Food Secure were combined into a "Food Insecure" group; all others were in the "Food Secure" group.

Homelessness. Homelessness was defined based on responses to nine questions about housing status that equate to homelessness as defined by U.S. Department of Education in the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act. The nine items have been used in other studies of college student homelessness in the U.S. and in the 2017 and 2020 surveys of NC State students. If students indicated they had slept in any of nine conditions (e.g., at a shelter, couch surfing, outdoor location, hotel or motel without a permanent home to return to) in the prior 12 months, they were classified as having experienced homelessness.

Housing Insecurity. In addition to the items related to homelessness, students were asked a single question about their housing security. The question was "Are you confident about your ability to pay for the place you're currently staying, so you can remain there at least until the end of the school year?" (yes/no). This item was included in the 2020 survey as well.

Well-being. The World Health Organization Five Factor Well-Being Index (WHO-5; Johansen, 1998) includes five items that describe states of well-being (e.g., "I have felt cheerful and in good spirits"). Students rated each statement on a 6-point scale based on how often each state was experienced (from "All of the time" to "At no time") in the past 30 days. Scores ranged from 0-5 and were summed for a total score ranging from 0-25, with higher scores indicating greater well-being. Students with total scores less than 13 are considered to have poor well-being. The WHO-5 was also used in the 2020 survey. Psychometric properties are strong (Topp, Østergaard, Søndergaard, & Bech, 2015). The tool has been validated as a screener for college students (Downs, Boucher, Campbell, & Polyakov, 2017). Internal consistency of the measure for the current sample was high (Cronbach's alpha = .87).

Financial experiences. As in the 2017 and 2020 surveys, students were asked to indicate which of 13 listed ways they paid for the expenses associated with attending the university; options related to using personal finances (e.g., savings account, employment), financial aid (e.g., scholarships, fellowships), and help from others (e.g., spouse, parents). Students were also asked about their work situation in the last 30

days, including whether they were working for pay, the number of hours worked, and whether they were seeking a job.

Receiving and giving support/resources. Students were asked to indicate whether they had received assistance from programs or services in the past 12 months. The list included support from local resources (e.g., community food pantry) and university resources (e.g., emergency fund, campus food pantry). These questions were also asked in prior surveys, but the specific items changed somewhat due to changes in resources available.

Students were also asked to indicate whether they had (a) given money to someone to help them make ends meet, (b) let another student stay at their place because the person had nowhere else to stay, (c) provided food for someone because that person didn't have money for food and had skipped meals, (d) loaned their car because the person had transportation challenges and/or (e) provided emotional support to another student who was highly stressed. These questions were also asked in the 2017 and 2020 surveys.

Results

Challenges Faced by Students

To gain an understanding of the magnitude of food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness, count and percentage statistics were calculated. Recognizing that students can face more than one challenge, count and percentage statistics were also calculated for combinations of these challenges. As seen in Table 3, 30% of students were food insecure in the prior 30 days, 11.3% were currently housing insecure, and 14% of students had experienced homelessness at some point in the prior year.

Table 3

Prevalence of Challenges Faced by Students

Challenge	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
Food Security (<i>n</i> = 1349)		
Insecure	406	30%
Secure	943	70%
Housing Security (<i>n</i> = 1354)		
Insecure	153	11.3%
Secure	1201	88.7%
Experienced Homelessness (<i>n</i> = 1357)		
Yes	190	14%
No	1167	86%
Food Insecure and/or Experienced Homelessness		
Food Insecure AND Homelessness (<i>n</i> = 1248)	89	7.1%
Food Insecure OR Homelessness (<i>n</i> = 1349)	507	37.6%

Table 4 provides specific information about the types of places students slept in the past year, including nine places that meet the federal Department of Education criteria for homelessness. Among the 190 students who experienced at least one form of homelessness, the number of different forms of homelessness experienced was 1-5 ($M = 1.26$; $SD = .62$). The form experienced most often was being doubled-up with others temporarily, followed by staying in a camper (2.4%) or outdoor location (2%).

College student living situations can be highly transient, with students living in many different arrangements during a single year. We conducted follow-up analyses to determine whether students who resided in residence halls or in family homes at some point during the year were more or less likely to experience homelessness during the year. Results of a chi square analysis showed that 15.6% of students who had lived in the residence halls had also been homeless at some point in the prior year; 12.5% of students who had *not* lived in a residence hall experienced homelessness. This difference was not significant, suggesting that living in a residence hall does not “protect” students from the experience of homelessness, $X^2(1) = 2.73$, $p = .098$. Analyses indicated that living in a family home at some point was associated with

greater likelihood of homelessness, $X^2(1) = 4.49, p < .05$. Specifically, 15.8% of students who had resided with family members at some point during the year also experienced homelessness during the year; 11.7% of students who had *not* resided with family members during the year had been homeless.

Table 4

Housing Situations of Students in Past 12 Months

Places slept in past 12 months	% of Students
Campus or University housing	44.9%
Sorority/Fraternity house	3.1%
In a rented or owned house, mobile home or apartment (alone, or with roommates or friends)	59.3%
In a rented or owned house, mobile home or apartment with family (parent, guardian or relative)	52.9%
Forms of homelessness	
At a shelter	0.3%
In a camper	2.4%
Temporarily staying with a relative, friend or couch surfing until you found other housing	6.9%
Temporarily at a hotel or motel without a permanent home to return to (not on vacation or business travel)	1.9%
In transitional housing or independent living program	1.0%
At a group home such as halfway house or residential program for mental health or substance use	0.1%
At a treatment center (such as detox., hospital etc.)	1.2%
Outdoor location such as street, sidewalk, or alley, bus or train stop, campgrounds or woods, park, beach or riverbed, under bridge or overpass	2.0%
In a closed area/space with a roof, but not meant for human habitation such as abandoned building, car or truck, van, RV or camper, encampment or tent or unconverted garage, attic or basement	1.0%

Next, we sought to understand the links among students' challenges. Table 5 shows the intersections between food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness. For example, among students that experienced food insecurity, 26.6% were also faced with housing insecurity compared to only 4.7% of students that were food secure also facing housing insecurity. Stated another way, almost all (95.3%) students who were food secure were also secure in their housing; only about 2/3 (73.2%) of students who were food insecure were secure in their housing. This difference was statistically significant ($p < .001$). In fact, links among the three challenges were all significant, with insecurity in housing and food being highly interconnected and both being linked to homelessness.

Table 5

Chi Square Tests of Association among Challenges– Percentage Details

	Food Security		Housing Security		Experienced Homelessness	
	Secure	Insecure	Secure	Insecure	No	Yes
Food Security (%)						
Secure	-	-	95.3	4.7***	89.3	10.7***
Insecure	-	-	73.3	26.6	78.1	21.9
Housing Security (%)						
Secure	75.2	24.8***	-	-	87.2	12.8**
Insecure	71.1	28.9	-	-	77.1	22.9
Homelessness Experience (%)						
No	72.6	27.4***	89.7	10.3**	-	-
Yes	53.2	46.8	81.5	18.5	-	-

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; ns = nonsignificant

Domains of Possible Impact on Students

Three impact domains were established that relate to students' lives: Well-being (Table 6); Work/Finances (Table 7); and Accessing Resources and Giving Support (Tables 8 and 9). Count and percentage statistics were calculated for these impacts.

Table 6

Students' Well-being

The mean well-being score for all participants was 14.04, the standard deviation was 4.65, and the range was 0-25. Scores below 13 are in the "poor well-being" range. The sample mean of 14.04 indicates that the sample, overall, was experiencing a low level of well-being. In fact, 35.5% of the students obtained scores in the poor range.

	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
Well-being ($n = 1439$)		
Good	928	64.5%
Poor	511	35.5%

As shown in Table 7 below, the most common source of funding for students' education was parental support, followed by financial aid and scholarships/loans, and employment. More than 50% of students were working and about 30% were working more than 20 hours/week.

Table 7

Students' Financial Experiences

	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
How do you pay for attending NCSU? (n = 1439)		
Parents are responsible	657	45.7%
Financial aid	552	38.4%
Grant or scholarship from NC State	467	32.5%
Student loans	435	30.2%
Job that is not work-study	393	27.3%
Personal savings	353	24.5%
Pell grant	211	14.7%
Grants from the government or a private organization	205	14.2%
Family, spouse or extended family	171	11.9%
Credit cards	168	11.7%
Work-study job	134	9.3%
529 education savings account	92	6.4%
Employer pays at least some educational expenses	51	3.5%
Graduate Student Support Plan (GSSP)	29	2.0%
GI bill	8	0.6%
Worked for pay in the last 30 days (n = 1398)	790	56.5%
Number of hours/week worked in last 30 days (n = 783)		
1-10 hours	250	31.9%
11-20 hours	300	38.3%
21-40 hours	162	20.7%
More than 40 hours	71	9.1%

The most frequently accessed resources on campus (Table 8) were the Counseling Center and the food pantry, Feed the Pack. It is noteworthy that 30% of students had been food insecure in the past 30 days but only 10% of students had been to the food pantry in the past year. Further, very few students accessed meal plan scholarships, benefitted from the meal share plan, or used More in My Basket to apply for SNAP benefits.

In terms of federal resources (not included in the Table due to very low numbers), fewer than 10 students accessed CARES funds, SSI, SSDI, Unemployment benefits, Earned Income Tax Credit, or Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF). Thirty (30) or fewer students accessed Veteran's benefits, Medicaid, or Supplemental Nutrition Aid Program (SNAP).

Table 8

Receiving Resources

University resources received in past 12 months (<i>n</i> = 1307)	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
Counseling Center	162	12.4%
Feed the Pack food pantry	132	10.1%
University Libraries technology loan program	91	7.0%
Student Emergency Fund for financial assistance	53	4.1%
CARES team (prevention services)	52	4.0%
Career Center/Wolfpack Styled Professional Clothing	39	3.0%
Meal plan scholarship	15	1.1%
Short-term loan via financial aid or Office of International Services	15	1.1%
Meal share program	12	0.9%
More in My Basket (assistance with SNAP application)	5	0.4%

To understand the degree to which students were supporting others, we asked participants to indicate which forms of assistance they had provided to someone else in the past year (see Table 9). Clearly, students are stepping up to assist others with basic needs. Students are particularly likely to support each other emotionally. This is a positive finding given serious concerns in recent years about the mental health challenges of college students nationally, including students on our campus.

Table 9

Giving Resources to Others in the Past Year.

Giving resources in the past 12 months (<i>n</i> = 1439)	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
Gave money to someone to help them make ends meet	314	21.8%
Let someone stay at student's home, apartment or dorm room because the person had nowhere else to stay	189	13.1%
Provided food for someone because they didn't have money for food and had skipped meals	321	22.3%
Let someone borrow student's vehicle because they had transportation challenges	221	15.4%
Emotionally supported another student struggling with a high level of stress	932	64.8%

Association between Challenges, Impacts, and Student Characteristics

Chi-square analysis was used to examine the associations among food security, housing insecurity, homelessness, and student characteristics.

Table 10 provides a summary of the results of chi-square tests of association between food/housing challenges and the College that students were enrolled in. Note that sample sizes (n) for each College are quite small; therefore, care should be taken in interpretation of results. It is unlikely that findings are reliable for Colleges with very small samples.

Differences among colleges were *not* statistically significant for food insecurity ($\chi^2 = 34.6$; $df = 24$, $p = .07$), housing insecurity ($\chi^2 = 33.3$; $df = 24$, $p = .10$) or homelessness ($\chi^2 = 16.7$; $df = 12$, $p = .16$).

Table 10

Food/Housing Challenges and College Enrolled In

College enrolled in ($n = 1435$)	n	% food insecure in past 30 days	% housing insecure	% homeless in last 12 months
Agriculture and Life Sciences	152	21.0%	10.2%	7.9%
Design	42	38.6%	13.7%	7.1%
Education	58	25.0%	16.7%	6.9%
Engineering	455	25.4%	18.2%	16.3%
The Graduate School	52	26.4%	17.0%	21.2%
Humanities & Social Sciences	194	36.6%	13.7%	13.9%
Management	85	26.9%	5.4%	12.9%
Natural Resources	76	32.5%	11.3%	18.4%
Sciences	156	31.3%	9.8%	15.4%
Textiles	41	32.6%	14.0%	12.2%
University College	35	22.0%	2.4%	8.6%
Veterinary Medicine	8	12.5%	0%	25%

In Table 11, rates of poor well-being are provided for each challenge. For example, of all the students deemed to be food *secure*, 28.7% have a Well-being status of Poor, (and 71.3% have a Well-being status of Not Poor) whereas of all the students deemed to be food *insecure*, 50.7% have a Well-being status of Poor. For each challenge, students who experience that challenge are significantly more likely to be experiencing poor wellness. This points to the significant link between food or housing insecurity/homelessness and students' well-being.

Table 11

Student Well-being, by Type of Basic Needs Insecurity

	Food Security		Housing Security		Experienced Homelessness	
	Secure (%)	Insecure (%)	Secure (%)	Insecure (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)
Well-being						
Poor	28.7	50.7***	32.9	54.2***	34.3	42.1*
Not Poor	71.3	49.3	67.1	45.8	65.7	57.9

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; ns = nonsignificant

A second set of analyses was conducted to compare the mean well-being scores of students who experienced each challenge with those who did not. Findings are shown in Table 12. Results indicate that students who experienced food security were significantly more likely to face poor well-being than those who were food secure. The same pattern was observed for housing insecurity. There was no statistically significant difference in well-being for students who had and had not been homeless, although findings were in the expected direction (i.e., mean well-being scores were lower for students who had experienced homelessness).

Table 12

Tests for Differences in Mean (SD) Well-being Scores for Students with and without Basic Needs Security.

Challenge	Mean Well-being ^a	SD	Range	t value (df)	p value
Food Security				77.55 (1)	<.001
Secure	14.74	4.37	2-25		
Insecure	12.39	4.81	0-25		
Housing Security				40.56 (1)	<.001
Secure	14.32	4.56	0-25		
Insecure	11.82	4.66	0-25		
Experienced Homelessness				2.06 (1)	.15 ns
No	14.11	4.51	0-25		
Yes	13.59	5.01	0-25		

^aWell-being scores less than 13 indicate poor well-being.

For each challenge, the percentage of students who used each source of funding for college expenses is shown in Table 11. In terms of efforts to pay for college expenses, results indicate that students who experience food or housing insecurity are significantly more likely than students whose food and housing is secure to be working, receiving Pell grants, assuming loans, and using credit cards to pay expenses. They are significantly less likely to have financial support from parents and savings or 529 accounts to pay for college. It is noteworthy that all results that were not significant were in the expected direction.

Table 11

Results of Chi-Square Tests of Association between Challenges and Impact Domains – Percentage Details

	Food Security		Housing Security		Experienced Homelessness	
	Secure (%)	Insecure (%)	Secure (%)	Insecure (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)
Paying for college expenses						
Have a job						
Yes	51.5	68.4**	54.5	70.6***	55.9	61.3 ns
No	48.5	31.6	45.5	28.8	44.1	38.7
Have a work-study job						
Yes	7.5	14.3***	8.7	15.0**	9.3	10.5 ns
No	92.5	85.7	91.3	85.0	90.7	89.5
Pell grant recipient						
Yes	11.7	22.9***	14.2	22.2**	14.5	18.9 ns
No	88.3	77.1	85.5	77.8	85.5	81.1
Financial aid recipient						
Yes	35.2	50.2***	38.7	46.4 ns	39.6	40.0 ns
No	64.8	49.8	61.3	53.6	60.4	60.0
Parents pay						
Yes	53.8	31.0***	50.1	21.6***	47.2	44.7 ns
No	46.2	69.0	49.9	78.4	52.8	55.3
Take loans						
Yes	26.8	42.4***	29.9	43.1***	30.4	37.9*
No	73.2	57.6	70.1	56.9	69.6	62.1
Use Savings						
Yes	22.3	31.3***	24.8	26.8 ns	24.3	30.0 ns
No	77.7	68.7	75.2	73.2	75.7	70.0
Use Credit						
Yes	10.1	16.7***	10.7	22.9***	11.0	18.9**
No	89.9	83.3	89.3	77.1	89.0	81.1
Use 529 account						
Yes	7.7	3.9**	7.1	3.3 ns	6.9	5.3 ns
No	92.3	96.1	92.9	96.7	93.1	94.7

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; ns = nonsignificant

In Table 12, findings related to students assisting others, by each challenge, are presented. For example, 22.9% of students who were not sure if they could afford their housing through the end of the school year let someone stay in their home while only 12.5% of students who were secure in their housing shared their housing with someone else. Nearly 40% of students who were food insecure shared their food with others while 15% of students who were secure in their food shared it with others. In each of the ways students could support others, those with insecure basic needs were more likely to give to others compared to students whose basic needs were secure, with all but one of 15 comparisons shown in Table 12 being statistically significant.

Table 12

Results of Chi-Square Tests of Association between Challenges and Giving Support – Percentage Details

	Food Security		Housing Security		Experienced Homelessness	
	Secure (%)	Insecure (%)	Secure (%)	Insecure (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)
Giving Support						
Gave money to someone	18.0	33.0***	21.6	28.8*	20.4	35.3***
Let someone stay in home	10.7	20.9***	12.5	22.9***	11.5	27.4***
Gave food to someone	16.5	38.9***	21.6	35.9***	20.8	38.4***
Loaned car to someone	14.3	19.7**	14.8	24.8***	14.7	23.7***
Provided emotional support	62.5	79.1***	66.5	73.9 ns	66.2	74.2***

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; ns = nonsignificant

In Table 13, findings related to use of resources, by each challenge, are presented. For example, 20.1% of students who were recently food insecure used Feed the Pack food pantry in the past year while only 5.7% of students who were recently secure in their food used the pantry (keep in mind that those students might have been food insecure at other points in the past year). Feed the Pack food pantry and the CARES team were significantly more likely to be accessed by students with insecure basic needs than were students who had secure food and housing and had not experienced homelessness. Students who were food insecure were more likely than students who were food secure to access each the campus resources. All nonsignificant results were in the expected direction.

Table 13

Results of Chi-Square Tests of Association between Challenges and Using Resources – Percentage Details

	Food Security		Housing Security		Experienced Homelessness	
	Secure (%)	Insecure (%)	Secure (%)	Insecure (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)
Accessing NCSU Resources						
Emergency fund	2.0	8.8***	3.1	11.6***	3.7	6.0 ns
Meal share	0.2	2.5***	0.7	2.7**	0.8	1.6 ns
Feed the Pack pantry	5.7	20.1***	8.3	24.0***	8.6	19.1***
Meal plan scholarship	0.4	2.5***	1.1	1.4 ns	0.9	2.7*
Library technology loan	6.0	9.3*	7.1	5.5 ns	6.4	10.4*
CARES team	3.0	6.3**	3.3	9.6***	3.0	9.8***
Counseling Center	10.5	16.6**	11.8	17.1 ns	11.7	16.4 ns

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; ns = nonsignificant

Association between challenges and demographic characteristics

For each demographic characteristic, the percentage of each characteristic value (e.g. heterosexual/straight; LGBTQIA+) experiencing a challenge is shown in Table 14. For example, of all the students who identified as a man, 71.1% were deemed to be food secure and 28.3% were deemed to be food insecure, whereas of all the students who identified as non-binary, only 50% were deemed to be food secure. It should be noted that, for the race variable, some categories were combined to avoid low cell sizes.

As indicated in the Table, gender identity is a significant factor for two of the challenges (food security and homelessness), with students identifying as non-binary being much more likely than other students to face food insecurity and homelessness. There is also strong evidence that students' food insecurity and housing insecurity are both associated with race; in particular, students who identify as white are less likely than students with other racial identities to experience food insecurity or housing insecurity. Students whose race is "Other" were at particularly high risk for food insecurity, at a rate of 50%. The survey results also show a significant association between age group and security of food and housing, with the 25-34 age group at greater risk than the youngest and oldest age groups. Homelessness was significantly associated with students' gender, but not with any other factor.

Table 14

Chi-Square Tests of Association between Challenges and Demographic Characteristics – Percentage Details

	Food Security		Housing Security		Experienced Homelessness	
	Secure	Insecure	Secure	Insecure	No	Yes
Gender Identity (%)						
Man	71.7	28.3*	89.5	10.5 ns	85.7	14.3*
Woman	69.1	30.9	88.5	11.5	87.1	12.9
Gender neutral, agender, pangender	66.7	33.3	84.6	15.4	84.6	15.4
Non-binary	50.0	50.0	89.2	10.8	67.6	32.4
Race (%)						
Asian	65.6	34.4***	87.8	12.2***	87.8	12.2 ns
Black/African Amer	60.0	40.0	82.9	17.1	82.9	17.1
Multi-racial	66.7	33.3	85.3	14.7	81.3	18.7
Other	50.0	50.0	71.7	28.3	90.0	10.0
White	73.5	26.5	91.5	8.5	86.0	14.0
Ethnicity (%)						
Hispanic/Latino/ Spanish origin	64.1	35.9 ns	80.3	19.7***	84.6	15.4 ns
Not Hispanic/Latino/ Spanish origin	70.2	29.8	89.9	10.1	86.3	13.7
Sexual Identity (%)						
Heterosexual/straight	72.3	27.7***	89.6	10.4 ns	87.0	13.0 ns
LGBTQIA+	60.2	39.8	86.5	13.5	83.0	17.0
Age Group (%)						
Under 25	72.3	27.7***	91.3	8.7***	86.0	14.0 ns
25 to 34	53.6	46.4	80.5	19.5	84.5	15.5
35 and over	75.0	25.0	80.8	19.2	94.2	5.8

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; ns = nonsignificant

Association between challenges and academic-related characteristics

For each academic-related characteristic, the percentage of each characteristic value facing a challenge is shown in Table 15. For example, 27% of students working toward bachelor's degrees were food insecure while almost 36% of graduate students were food insecure. Results suggest a complex dynamic between students' academic-related characteristics and their food and housing challenges. Students pursuing bachelor's degrees were less likely than graduate students to experience food and housing insecurity, but there were no significant differences in terms of homelessness; this contrasts with prior survey findings in which graduate students experienced

homelessness at higher rates than undergraduates. Students in their first year at NC State were less likely to experience food insecurity but were not less likely to face housing insecurity or homelessness. Students who were transfers from community college were significantly more likely to experience food and housing insecurity.

Table 15

Results of Chi-Square Tests between Challenges & Academic-Related Characteristics

	Food Security		Housing Security		Experienced Homelessness	
	Secure	Insecure	Secure	Insecure	No	Yes
Degree Sought (%)						
Bachelor's degree	72.3	27.7*	91.1	8.9***	86.4	13.6 ns
Master's degree	64.1	35.9	81.6	18.4	86.5	13.5
Doctoral degree	64.5	35.5	84.7	15.3	83.7	16.3
Length of time at NCSU (%)						
In first year at NC State.	76.2	23.8***	90.6	9.4 ns	85.5	14.5 ns
Enrolled at NC State > one year	66.4	33.6	87.6	12.4	86.4	13.6
Transfer status (%)						
Transfer from community college	59.5	40.5**	80.4	19.6***	85.7	14.3 ns
Not a transfer student	71	29	90.1	9.9	86.1	13.9

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; ns = nonsignificant

Conclusions

Findings from this survey point to a dramatic increase in food insecurity and homelessness among our students over a brief six-year period, from fall of 2017 to fall of 2023. Despite an influx of basic needs resources and emergency financial support available for students, they continue to experience basic needs insecurity at alarming rates. Food insecurity increased to 30% and homelessness essentially remained stable from 2020, at 14% of our student population. There was also an increase in housing insecurity. In 2020, 9.4% of students were not confident that they could pay for their housing through the end of the academic year; by 2023, 11.3% of students were not secure in their housing situation. Consistent with prior survey findings, basic needs challenges tend to be linked, with food and housing insecurity interconnected and closely related to an experience of homelessness. For example, recent food insecurity is almost twice as common for students who have been homeless at some point in the past year compared to students who have not been homeless. Students with recent food insecurity are much more likely than students who are food secure to be at risk of losing their housing before this school year ends.

Our students are working long hours; 30% of our students are working more than 20 hours a week. Students who are challenged with food and housing insecurity are more likely than students with secure basic needs to be working, to take out loans, to receive Pell grants, and to use their savings for costs associated with college. They are less likely than other students to have parental financial support and 529 college savings plans. As found in prior surveys, students experiencing food or housing insecurity and students who have been homeless are significantly more likely to share their limited resources with others; when we support these students, their generosity will benefit other students. In terms of using available campus resources, students facing food and housing insecurity or homelessness are much more likely to access the campus food pantry and the CARES team. Students who are food insecure are more likely to access all available resources compared to the rate at which food secure students use the resources. Yet, they continued to be challenged by food insecurity.

This was the first time that students were asked to identify their College in the basic needs survey, and we found no difference in basic needs insecurity of students across Colleges – leadership in *all* Colleges should be actively engaged in efforts to ensure the well-being of their students. Consistent with prior surveys, transfers from community college, graduate students, students of Color, students who are nonbinary in their gender identification, and students who are members of LGBTQIA+ community are at greater risk of one or more forms of basic needs insecurity. These disparities must be addressed as they impede the university's movement toward educational and economic equity.

The link between basic needs insecurity and well-being is robust. Although these data are correlational and we cannot conclude that food and housing insecurity and homelessness cause poor well-being, the connection between these experiences is undeniable. It is noteworthy that many students at our university (35.5%) indicate that they rarely feel cheerful, calm, or in good spirits; they are not well-rested; and they lack vigor. Even in the context of a high rate of poor well-being for the general population of students, these feelings are far more pervasive among students who are food or housing insecure and those who have experienced homelessness. In fact, more than 50% of students who are food secure and who are concerned that they might not be able to stay in their current housing were experiencing poor well-being.

The steering committee on student food and housing security at our land-grant institution produced a Call to Action in 2018 with recommendations for addressing basic needs insecurity. With support at all levels of administration and dedicated work of compassionate staff, many of those recommendations have been followed. We now have a coordinated approach for students to apply for emergency and short-term aid via Pack Essentials and a dedicated physical hub that houses the food pantry and other resources. As evidence that NC State has been a leader in these efforts, the university (i.e., the Steering Committee on Food and Housing Security) won a national award in 2021 for efforts to reduce food and housing insecurity among our students.

No doubt, such efforts have been a critical stopgap measure for many individual students. However, the results of this study indicate that the efforts have not been successful in terms of reducing rates of basic needs insecurity at the student population level. Our institution must move beyond charitable emergency support in which there are mighty efforts to bestow financial and material support to “needy” students. Large-scale systemic problems require systemic solutions. While continuing charitable efforts, we must take on systemic changes and new approaches that will lift *all* students toward food and housing security.

Below we provide guidance for these systemic solutions. NC State is well-situated to follow the recommendations provided herein and to serve as a model for other higher education institutions in the state. Although the strategies suggested will require upper-level administrative action, students also must be involved in discussion and implementation at every step. They bring a unique perspective, and their genuine involvement will shape initiatives to be most impactful.

Notes regarding the study:

Gratitude is extended to the many students who completed the survey.

M. Haskett extends appreciation to Stevie Kimmet, MSW, graduate assistant with Pack Essentials and doctoral candidate in Sociology for assistance with data preparation and preliminary analyses. Nancy Whelchel, Institutional Strategy and Analysis, assisted with identification of the sample.

The NC State University Steering Committee on Student Food and Housing Security assisted in editing the student survey and interpretation of the results.

Contact M. Haskett for further information or suggestions for additional analysis that would be helpful in advocacy: mary_haskett@ncsu.edu

The study was self-funded.

PART 2

Recommendations

The recommendations proposed herein are co-authored by the NC State Steering Committee on Student Food and Housing Security and M. Haskett. Since its inception in 2017, the Steering Committee has been the informal campus leader in promoting awareness and generating solutions to students' basic needs insecurity. Members of the committee are staff, faculty, and students representing units across campus. We offer the following recommendations for systemic approaches to ensure that our students can access affordable, safe, stable housing and sufficient food without relying on the food pantry. We focus on systemic solutions because "downstream" efforts have been undertaken for years with limited impact at the student population level. This set of recommendations can be viewed as an upstream expansion of the [Call to Action](#) proposed in 2018.

1. Designate an executive-level leader to be responsible for ensuring *measurable* increases in student food and housing security.

Many individual Steering Committee members have taken personal responsibility for moving this work forward and members of upper administration have been supportive in various ways, but executive-level leadership is needed for systems change. We call for a Vice Chancellor or Assistant Vice Chancellor to be designated and equipped for ensuring *measurable* increases in student food and housing security. The centrality of basic needs security in students' success is evident in three major plans for NC State's future. This is an excellent time to capitalize on those plans because each one includes attention to student basic needs as a component of wellness:

Strategic Plan. In 2021, NC State released [Wolfpack 2030: Powering the Extraordinary](#). Of direct relevance to basic needs security, the university's strategic plan places emphasis on well-being. Goal 4 promotes "a culture of equity, diversity, inclusion, belonging, and well-being in all we do". The plan further states, "We must respond innovatively – developing effective, impactful ways to strengthen the health and well-being of our campus community...").

Physical Master Plan 2023. In 2023, NC State released a [Physical Master Plan](#) to guide development of the campus over the next decade. Three key "Planning Drivers" that impact future planning are articulated and one of those drivers is Supporting Student Success. As stated in the plan, "Much of what determines a student's success occurs outside of classrooms and labs. Supporting the whole student, their physical and mental wellbeing, helping them feel included and welcome, and providing them basic necessities such as food and shelter are all important aspects of success that the university must provide."

The master plan includes many opportunities to support basic necessities required for student success. For example, “Residential neighborhoods” described in the master plan should incorporate supportive housing for students that includes a basic needs navigator and a food pantry on site. Priority for this housing should be given to students most likely to experience food and housing insecurity based on the results of Haskett’s survey. Potential locations for supportive housing and innovative designs for those properties have been proposed by graduate students in the College of Design and are described in a report by Thomas Barrie, Professor of Architecture, [Affordable and Supportive Housing for NC State Students](#).

In addition to new residence halls, the university can purchase housing adjacent to campus, as was done to acquire University Towers. In new builds and acquisitions, University Housing might consider setting aside units for students at risk of homelessness, using the student survey data report for guidance. There is precedence for setting aside housing for specific groups of students. To illustrate, starting in the 2024-25 academic year, the Engineering Village will expand to host sophomore and transfer students on Centennial Campus in Wolf Ridge Apartments – Valley Hall. The focus of the village's expansion is to “provide continuous support for students with their journey with College of Engineering, career readiness, mental health and wellness”. Note that this is not new housing, it is a re-distribution of beds from the general student population to students in the College of Engineering, the college celebrating enormous growth in the coming years (as described below).

Wellness Task Force Report. NC State, like other universities across the country, is struggling to meet the mental health care needs of our student population. In response, NC State formed a Student Mental Health task force in 2022. In the [Student Mental Health Task Force Report: Executive Summary](#), the task force states,

“To enhance a culture of care, we must identify the root causes that are barriers to student mental health and continually assess the environment for emerging challenges. The feedback we received from our community aligns with the root causes found in the literature. Those barriers and challenges include an inability to meet basic needs (food, housing, transportation, and finances), rigid coursework expectations, a perceived lack of empathy and flexibility from faculty, limited access to resources, a lack of a sense of belonging, and policies that negatively affect mental health. Recommendations for bolstering a culture of care seek to respond to these challenges.” (page 7).

Authors of the summary quote a graduate student who stated in an online survey, “We are food insecure. We are housing insecure. Graduate student income is below the poverty line. Even the university housing is more than half of our monthly stipend. How are we supposed to be mentally healthy under these conditions?” A specific recommendation in the Executive Summary is “Continue to address food insecurity, housing instability, and other environmental factors to minimize these barriers to well-being”.

2. Consider the Impact of University Policies and Practices

Enrollment Growth. Increases in enrollment should be preceded by comparable increases in available university-owned student housing. The university is celebrating a rapid and substantial increase in enrollment in the College of Engineering, with plans to enroll about 4,000 additional students in engineering and computer science over the next few years. The additional students are arriving immediately, so plans to increase housing must be accelerated. In the university's [announcement of this plan](#) it is stated, "The funding for this effort comes from "Engineering North Carolina's Future," a state legislative initiative that will provide NC State with \$20 million over the next two years to hire additional faculty and staff and \$30 million for facility upgrades, with the aim of supporting that growing student body and the university as a whole." We ask that facility upgrades include student housing. Without an increase in student housing units, the influx of students will intensify the housing shortage—and therefore the cost—of the limited available housing for all our students.

Required on-campus living. Evaluation of the impact of the residency requirement on student success and housing security of non-freshmen is strongly encouraged. NC State requires freshmen/first-year students, with a few exceptions, to live on campus. This policy is meant to build community among new students and living on campus is "an essential part of the Wolfpack experience". Ostensibly, this seems like a reasonable policy and is certainly a popular requirement at many U.S. colleges. However, the requirement can be a financial stress for some students. For the current academic year 2023-2024, the published estimated cost of housing is \$7,996 for two semesters (approximately 9 months; \$888.00/month). At that cost, students could afford to live in only 4 of the 14 on-campus residence halls (excluding the two residence halls at the coast) based on prices listed on the university Housing website (adding \$280.00 for internet service that is not included in the cost of housing but is required). Further contributing to the cost of on-campus housing is the requirement to purchase a meal plan. All first-year students living on campus are automatically enrolled in the plan that costs \$5,150 + tax/academic year. In spite of the high cost of rent in Raleigh, some students might be able to find less expensive housing off campus.

Given the shortage of campus housing (evidenced by wait lists), the residency requirement means there are fewer beds for upper-level students who want on campus housing. In interviews with NC State students who had experienced homelessness (Haskett, Cooke, & Goodell, 2023), some students would have preferred to live on campus rather than sign a costly year-long lease for off campus housing, but the "reverse seniority policy" made it difficult to secure on-campus housing. One student stated, *"[students with] lower credit hours get to choose first. ... and since I was basically the rank of a senior, I would get the very, very, very last pick, if there was anything."*

Research shows that the impact of required residency is nuanced, and the supposed benefits might not apply to all students or all types of campuses (Turley & Wodtke, 2010). Other institutions in the UNC system (e.g., UNC-Greensboro and UNC-Charlotte) do not have a residency requirement; how do retention data and other

indicators of success for students at those institutions compare to NC State student data?

Estimated Cost of Attendance (COA) and Need-Based Aid. Given the high and rising cost of housing in Wake County, NC State should consider increasing the COA for students' housing so students can prepare for the true cost. Increases in the COA should be associated with increases in need-based financial aid available to students to help them in meeting the rising costs of student housing. The COA figure is intended to represent a reasonable estimate of the expenses for a typical student with an average set of circumstances. Unfortunately, the COA is lower than the average cost of rent adjacent to campus. To illustrate, in the new [Housing Market Report](#) released by the Hillsborough Street Community Service Corporation, the purpose-built student housing (PBSH) market along Hillsborough Street includes 5,291 beds and "is healthy and growing, with low vacancy rates and rising rents". Average monthly rents per bed in Q4 of 2023 were \$1,360 for studios/1 bedroom units, \$990 for 3 bedroom units, and \$861 for 2 bedroom units. Of the 16 PBSH properties included in the report, only 2 (University Towers and Method Townhomes) rent at a cost consistent with the NC State COA. Certainly, students can find places to live that are less expensive than these apartments along Hillsborough St., but 11.3% of our students are not confident that they will be able to afford to retain their current housing for the rest of the school year. Having sufficient funds available to pay the expected cost of housing (using the COA as a guide), along with adequate financial aid, could reduce students' housing insecurity.

Student pay/stipends for on-campus positions. We strongly recommend a campus-wide salary study for student workers, including graduate research/teaching assistantships and work-study positions. This would provide a complete picture of current practices and assist in making needed adjustments to ensure an equitable and sustainable salary strategy across campus. At a minimum, there should be regular cost of living adjustments to student pay and stipends.

With respect to graduate assistantships, grad students in the current survey were significantly more likely to be food insecure. Although the difference in homelessness was not statistically significant, it is certainly noteworthy that 16% of doctoral students had been homeless in the past year, compared to 13.6% of undergraduates. There are likely many explanations for basic needs insecurity among graduate students, but low assistantship pay is a significant concern. College deans have attempted to increase pay, but progress has been minimal and slow to come. Many graduate students that attend NC State are international students who are not able to be employed locally, so they rely on their assistantship for living expenses. In the Student Mental Health Task Force Report: Executive Summary, this graduate student quote is included: *"TAs and RAs NEED MORE MONEY TO LIVE. Do something about that. And not just enough to make us not eligible for food stamps anymore, but enough to live outside the walls of the academy... I want the money, I deserve the money I need to be able to have a LIFE. When TAs and RAs have lives, our mental health improves, and we produce better scholarship and are better able to support each other and undergrad students."*

Undergraduate on-campus employment and federal work study (FWS) should also be examined. According to the university website on FWS, “The allowable wage range is \$7.25 - \$15.00 per hour. If employers wish to pay a higher wage, exceptions are granted on a case-by-case basis.” According to the US Department of Education, how much a student earns is dependent on the individual university’s work study program. Given that flexibility, the minimum wage should be raised significantly. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition report, [Out of Reach](#), a person living in NC who is earning \$7.25/hr would need to work 2.2 full-time jobs (or 90 hours/week) to afford a 1-bedroom rental home (at FMR). Surely NC State can do better than “minimum”.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) application support. Rather than wait for students to reach a food and nutrition crisis and refer them to the food pantry, all students with \$0 Expected Family Contribution (EFC) and those eligible for FWS should be assisted in applying for SNAP. Other student groups at risk of food insecurity could be added to this policy. During the pandemic, eligibility for SNAP benefits was expanded to students with \$0 EFC and those who were eligible for FWS. With that expansion, many NC State students were able to qualify for benefits. Unfortunately, the expansion was recently retracted and students lost the benefits they had relied on. NC State should join organizations that are encouraging Congress to overhaul SNAP eligibility rules that undermine federal and state investments in higher education and make it harder for people with low incomes to combine work and education. While joining advocates engaged in this important advocacy, we also have an opportunity to ramp up systematic efforts to support students’ SNAP applications. Relevant staff (e.g., financial aid staff, TRIO support staff) should be trained in methods to assist students with applications and outcomes of the assistance should be monitored so adjustments can be made in the process as necessary.

3. Deepen Partnerships on Local Affordable Housing & Basic Needs Initiatives:

Consistent with our land-grant mission, NC State leaders are encouraged to initiate and/or deepen partnerships with private and public entities focused on affordable housing in our county – a significant challenge as the affordable housing supply is diminishing while our population (and student enrollment) is rapidly growing. Given the nature of solutions needed, an upper-level university administrator at the Vice Chancellor or Assistant Vice Chancellor level (e.g., Campus Planning and Strategic Investment; Design and Construction; External Affairs, Partnerships & Economic Development) should be involved in the initiatives described below.

NC State University is adjacent to downtown Raleigh on 2,099 acres; an additional 3,000 acres includes nearby research farms, biology and ecology sites, horticulture and floriculture nurseries, and research forests. “Town-gown” relations have been positive through the years with many productive partnerships between the university and the local community. It is time to extend those partnerships to meet the affordable housing challenge. According to the Wake County Department of Housing

Affordability and Community Revitalization 2023 Annual Housing Report, rental housing for less than \$1,000/month decreased by 46% between 2010 and 2020. A search at the [College Pads](#) website for student housing in Raleigh on February 6, 2024 yielded this message: “No Rentals in This Area.”

In an *Inside Higher Ed* article on the role of higher education institutions in addressing affordable housing, Paul Schofield states, “This leads us to the most important step colleges could take, which would be to ramp up efforts to make housing affordable in the municipalities where they’re located. We know that a lack of affordable housing is the major driver of homelessness. We know that college students facing homelessness often attend institutions where the cost of housing is high.” Many agree that colleges have a responsibility to contribute to solutions to create sufficient affordable housing in local communities. During the spring of 2024, Campus Compact is offering a six-part conversation series, [What Anchor Institutions Need to Know About Affordable Housing](#), to encourage higher education anchor institutions to support and contribute to the supply of affordable housing in their communities. There are models for such partnerships. For example, The University of Virginia (UVA) is embarking on a bold affordable housing initiative to support the development of 1,000+affordable housing units over a decade on land that is owned by UVA or the UVA Foundation. Closer to home, Duke University has engaged in multiple strategies to address the lack of affordable housing in Durham; a recent investment is the construction of Willard Street Apartments which added 82 units of affordable housing. The project was a partnership between Duke, the City of Durham, DHIC, private foundations, and others. These and other case studies are described by the [Penn Institute for Urban Research](#).

Several partnerships that NC State can join are already primed by early collaborations between the city/county and local higher education institutions focused on basic needs of college students. This momentum, described below, should be taken advantage of through involvement of university administration at high levels:

Wake County. Like many locations across the U.S., housing affordability is a significant challenge for our county. County leaders recognize that the loss of affordable housing in Wake County places a serious burden on college students. To reduce the burden, Wake County is a major funder of a new host home program aimed at prevention of college student homelessness in our community -- [HOST](#) (Housing Options for Students Today). Further, Wake County commissioners established an Affordable Housing Advisory Working Group in 2021 and higher education is listed as one of 17 sectors to be represented in the group <https://www.wake.gov/departments-government/housing-affordability-community-revitalization/affordable-housing-advisory-working-group>. Creative approaches that are discussed in this group typically involve collaborations among potential funders, multi-family housing developers, municipalities, and other partners. An opening for a 2-year term as the higher education representative is imminent and we strongly recommend that an NC State administrator apply for the position. This is an excellent opportunity to be at the center of housing innovation that could directly benefit NC State students.

City of Raleigh. As stated recently [Stephanie Onuaja of the National League of Cities](#), “Cities and their higher education institutions stand to gain significant benefits from such collaborations [in affordable housing efforts], offering a holistic approach to address the intersectional needs of both students and long-term residents.” In 2021-2023, the City of Raleigh participated with local higher education institutions (led by NC State) in the National League of Cities initiative, [Cities Addressing Basic Needs of Postsecondary Students](#). The [mission of the collaborative](#) is to strengthen partnerships between the City of Raleigh and local post-secondary institutions to identify the barriers to students’ basic needs and provide needed resources related to housing, food security, digital inclusion, and mental health. Collaboration members continue to meet bi-monthly and established three activities that are currently underway. The City is investing in support for students’ basic needs and collaboration with the universities is already primed and ready for deeper connection. Currently, a professor represents NC State in the initiative, but for the initiative to move “upstream” to address systemic factors that impact students, a representative at a higher level must participate and contribute for the benefit of our students’ well-being.

4. Expand Existing Partnerships to include Student Basic Needs

Business community. The appropriate campus offices should reach out to NC State employer partners to describe the food and housing security crisis that many students face and propose that these employers expand their subsidized student housing programs to all students who are willing to work for companies in part-time positions and internships. Many NC State University employer partners already subsidize housing for their co-op students and full-time summer interns so that their student workers can afford to work for them. This ensures that students have the safe housing they need to excel in the classroom and in their internship placements, successfully graduate, and potentially become full-time hires for these businesses. Subsidized housing also helps ensure equity in internship placements as it renders unpaid internships an option for under-resourced students.

Nonprofits. Several nonprofit organizations with links to NC State have shown interest in addressing housing and other basic needs of college students. At the state level, MyFutureNC leadership and Board of Directors, including an NC State Vice Chancellor, understand that a better educated North Carolina is the key to economic prosperity and upward mobility for all citizens. They further recognize that “many of our postsecondary students are ‘one flat tire’ away from dropping out...” MyFutureNC’s [policy brief](#) on postsecondary completion calls for expanded student financial support, both need-based academic support and “aid earmarked for helping secondary students weather challenges like food and housing insecurity...” University leaders should join advocacy efforts of MyFutureNC to increase awareness of these issues among state policymakers.

At the local level, the Hillsborough Street Community Service Corporation (HSCSC) is an independent, 501(c)(3), not-for-profit, municipal service district created by the City of Raleigh in partnership with NC State University and the property owners, merchants, and residents on and around Hillsborough Street. As noted above, this non-profit organization recently invested resources into an assessment and report of the housing supply on our campus and in the surrounding neighborhoods. They give a full-page acknowledgement of HOST in their report, which highlights their interest in solutions to college student homelessness. NC State is already a member of the HSCSC, with staff and administrators serving on the Board and Executive Committee, so it would be convenient to partner with this group *specifically focused on the supply of affordable housing* along the Hillsborough St. corridor.

Cooperating Raleigh Colleges is a non-profit consortium that started in 1968 to connect the six higher education institutions in Raleigh/Wake County and to link the colleges to the local community. The NC State Provost serves as the current President of the CRC and three other top university leaders serve on the CRC Executive Board. The CRC is represented and active in the City of Raleigh Basic Needs initiative referenced above. Initiatives shared across all institutions could be productive. For example, campuses that have empty residence halls could offer their open rooms to students on campuses with wait lists. This model has been successful in other cities. NC State members of CRC committees should suggest that each CRC committee consider higher education/community partnerships that would support students' basic needs security.

We strongly recommend that Dining be encouraged to pursue a partnership that would allow recovered food to be processed and made available to students. There are numerous nonprofit organizations focused on food security that could partner with Dining to decrease both food waste and food insecurity among our students. For example, leaders of the nonprofit [Kelly's Community Kitchen](#) recently contacted Steering Committee members and Dining leaders to propose a collaboration in which the organization would coordinate with University Dining to recover surplus food from campus dining and catered events and return packaged single-serving meals for distribution by the food pantry. The only cost would be staff time to set aside the surplus food. This is consistent with the Food and Housing Implementation Team of the Mental Health Task Force recommendation for active food recovery efforts from dining halls. This approach to reducing food waste would also be consistent with [University Dining's sustainability initiatives](#). Although we do not recommend that students be held responsible for large-scale food recovery efforts, students could be supported in activating the NC State University [Food Recovery Network](#) chapter to direct food recovered from dining halls back to students.

In closing, these recommendations focus on "upstream" systemic approaches to ensure that all NC State students have adequate food and housing to meet their most basic needs while they pursue their educational goals. The Steering Committee on Student Food and Housing Security is poised to partner with university leadership to assist in following these recommendations. As stated at the outset, the

suggestions we put forth are innovative and bold and will require actions that challenge—and might disrupt—current policies and practices. But that is what Wolfpack 2030: Powering the Extraordinary requires. This is urgent – let’s get to it.

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Appendix A: Survey Items

Q1 As of today, are you attending NC State full-time or part-time?

Full-time

Part-time

Q2 Currently, what degree are you pursuing?

Associate's degree

Bachelor's degree

Master's degree

Doctoral degree

Non-degree seeking

Q3 How many years have you been an NC State student?

I am in my first year at NC State.

I have been enrolled at NC State for more than a year.

Q4 Which college are you enrolled in?

- College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
- College of Design
- College of Education
- College of Engineering
- College of Humanities and Social Sciences
- College of Natural Resources
- Poole College of Management
- College of Sciences
- Wilson College of Textiles
- College of Veterinary Medicine
- The Graduate School
- University College

Q5 How are you paying for the expenses associated with attending NCSU? (Check all that apply)

I receive financial aid

I get the Pell grant

- I have other grants from the government or from a private organization
- I have a grant or scholarship from NC State
- I have a work-study job
- I have a job that isn't a work-study job
- My employer pays at least some educational expenses
- My parents are responsible for my college expenses
- I get financial help from extended family or friends
- I use credit cards
- I take out student loans
- I draw funds from a 529 (tax-free) college savings plan
- I use savings
- Other _____

Q6 In the last 30 days, did you have a job where you worked for pay?

Yes

No

Display This Question:

If in the last 30 days, did you have a job where you worked for pay? = Yes

Q7 In the last 30 days, about how many hours a week did you work?

1-10 hours

11-20 hours

21-30 hours

31-40 hours

More than 40 hours

Display This Question:

If in the last 30 days, did you have a job where you worked for pay? = No

Q8 In the last 30 days, have you been searching for work?

Yes

No

Q9 Please indicate whether you received income/benefits from each program or service below in the past year: (Check all that apply)

- Federal CARES funds
- TANF (Public cash assistance; formerly called ADC or ADCF)
- SSI (Supplemental security income)
- SSDI (Social security disability income)
- Unemployment compensation
- Tax refunds
- Earned income tax credit (EITC)

Veteran's benefits (Veteran's administration benefits for a serviceman's, widow's, survivor's pension, service disability or the GI bill)

Q10 Please indicate whether you received assistance from each program or service below in the past 12 months: (Check all that apply)

- SNAP (Food stamps, also called EBT or NC Food and Nutrition Services benefits) (1)
- WIC (Nutritional assistance for pregnant women and children) (2)
- Medicaid or public health insurance (3)
- Off campus food pantry/food bank/meal donations (4)
- Child care assistance/subsidy (5)
- Employment assistance from NCWorks Career Center (6)
- Transportation assistance (7)
- Utility assistance (8)
- Subsidized housing assistance (9)

Q11 Please indicate whether you received assistance from these university resources in the past 12 months: (Check all that apply)

- Student Emergency Fund
- Meal share program
- Meal plan scholarship
- Feed the Pack food pantry
- Career Center
- Office of International Services
- University Libraries technology loan program
- Counseling Center
- Short-term loan programs via financial aid or Office of International Services (OIS)
- CARES team (Prevention Services)
- More in My Basket
- Student Legal services

Q12 In the past 12 months, did you: (Check all that apply)

- Give money to someone to help them make ends meet?
- Let someone stay at your home, apartment or residence hall room because the person had nowhere else to stay?
- Provide food for someone because they didn't have money for food and had skipped meals?
- Let someone borrow your vehicle because they had transportation challenges?

Q13 Do you share most of your meals with people living in your household (i.e., family members/roommates) or manage your own food arrangements?

Share Meals

Manage my own meals

Q14 Please read the following statements that people have made about their food situation and state whether they were often true, sometimes true, or never true in the last 30 days :

	Often True	Sometimes True	Never True	Don't Know
"The food that we bought just didn't last, and we didn't have money to get more."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"We couldn't afford to eat balanced meals"	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q15 In the last 30 days, did you ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?

Yes

No

Don't Know

Q16 In the last 30 days, how many times did you cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?

Fewer than 3 times

3 or more times

Q17 Please respond to each question below concerning your food situation *over the last 30 days*.

	Yes (1)	No (2)	Don't Know (3)
In the last 30 days, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In the last 30 days, were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q18 In the past 12 months, have you slept in any of the following places, even for one night?

Campus or University housing

Sorority/Fraternity house

In a rented or owned house, mobile home or apartment (alone, or with roommates or friends)

In a rented or owned house, mobile home or apartment with family (parent, guardian or relative)

At a shelter

In a camper or RV

Temporarily staying with a relative, friend or couch surfing until you found other housing

Temporarily at a hotel or motel 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 halfway house or residential program for mental health or substance use

At a treatment center (such as detox., hospital etc.)

Outdoor location such as street, sidewalk, or alley, bus or train stop, campgrounds or woods, park, beach or riverbed, under bridge or overpass

In a closed area/space with a roof, but not meant for human habitation such as abandoned building; car or truck, van; encampment or tent; unconverted garage, attic or basement

Q19 I feel confident about my ability to pay for the place I'm staying, so I can stay here at least for the rest of the semester.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Q20 How do you describe yourself? (check one)

Man

Woman

Transgender man

Transgender woman

Non-binary

Gender neutral, agender, or pangender

I use a different term (please specify) _____

Q21 How do you identify? (check one)

Heterosexual or straight

Gay or lesbian

Bisexual

Asexual

Questioning

I use a different term (please specify) _____

Q22 How old are you, in years?

Q23 How do you describe your race? (Select all that apply)

American Indian or Alaska Native

Asian

Black or African American

Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

White

Other _____

Q24 How do you describe your ethnicity?

Hispanic or Latino or Spanish origin (1)

Not Hispanic or Latino or Spanish origin (2)

Q25 Which of the following describe(s) your circumstances? Please check all that apply; remember, your responses are anonymous.

Came to NC State from a community college

Student with disabilities

First generation (First Gen) college student (Your parents didn't attend college)

Current or former foster youth/child

International student

Out-of-state student

ESL (English as a Second Language) student

Veteran

Student athlete

Single parent

Parent of a child under 18 who lives with you

Q26 For each statement, please indicate which is closest to how you have been feeling *over the last 30 days*:

	All of the time (1)	Most of the time (2)	More than half of the time (3)	Less than half of the time (4)	Some of the time (5)	At no time (6)
I have felt cheerful and in good spirits	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have felt calm and relaxed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have felt active and vigorous	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I woke up feeling fresh and rested	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My daily life has been filled with things that interest me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel safe on this campus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

END OF SURVEY