

**MONTCLAIR STATE
UNIVERSITY**

Montclair State University

Campus Hunger Free Task Force

An Audit of Food Security, Perceptions, and Experiences of
Students at Montclair State University between 2018 and 2022

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✂ Introduction

The Hunger Free Task Force

In 2016, a preliminary student-led survey identified a notable student need for food and other household necessities. As a result, in 2016, Montclair State University became the first four-year university in New Jersey to open an on-campus food pantry: the Red Hawk Pantry. In 2019, University researchers Chris Snyder and Dr. Lauren Dinour initiated the first administration of a standardized food security survey to the University's student population. This survey was intended to inform program developments to projects overseen by Snyder and Dinour. Information from this survey highlighted areas of student need, and contributed to the formation of the Montclair State University Campus Hunger Free Task Force. The Hunger-Free Task Force is composed of University organizations and staff dedicated to addressing the issues adult students face while pursuing higher education at Montclair State University.

This report was authored for the Montclair State University Campus Hunger-Free Task Force,¹ and its constituents: the Montclair State University Campus Community Garden,² the Montclair State University chapter of the Food Recovery Network,³ the Red Hawk Pantry,⁴ and the Office of the Dean of Students.⁵ It is intended to provide guidance to these University organizations in identifying and addressing student food needs, including, but not limited to: food insecurity; lack of access to culturally, religiously, allergically, or nutritionally appropriate food; and emergency food needs. This report provides necessary updates to the University statistics on student food security, including the prevalence of student food insecurity and student perceptions of the campus food environment. This report also sets, and contributes to, a baseline measurement which has been standardized to allow for comparison between this and other populations (i.e., by utilizing a modified version of the standardized USDA Household Food Security Survey Tool), and allows for follow-up surveys to be performed in order to measure progress made towards addressing student food security by the above mentioned campus entities and others, as identified.

¹<https://www.montclair.edu/hunger-free/>

²<https://www.montclair.edu/pseg-sustainability-institute/campus-community-garden/>

³<https://www.montclair.edu/hunger-free/food-recovery-network/>

⁴<https://www.montclair.edu/student-services/red-hawk-pantry/>

⁵<https://www.montclair.edu/dean-of-students/>

Timeline

Below is a timeline of events related to the Montclair State University Campus Hunger Free Task Force and its component organizations.

2016 Student-led research, as part of a capstone project, investigated student difficulty in purchasing household necessities, toiletries, and food.

Montclair State University opens the Red Hawk Pantry, an on-campus food pantry for student use.

2017 The Montclair State University chapter of the Food Recovery Network is established, with Dr. Lauren Dinour as Faculty Advisor.

2018 The Montclair State University Campus Community Garden is established, with Chris Snyder, MPH as Garden Coordinator.

2019 Chris Snyder and Dr. Lauren Dinour initiated the University's first administration of the USDA Household Food Security Survey Module, a standardized tool for measuring prevalence of food insecurity. This tool is administered yearly.

Montclair State University responds to research findings and establishes the Campus Hunger-Free Task Force (HFTF)

2020 Beginning of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Students leave campus for remote learning.

2021 Montclair State University designated by the State of New Jersey as a Hunger-Free Campus, in acknowledgement of University's dedication and progress towards addressing student food needs. Montclair State University received a two-year grant of \$100,000 from the New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education to expand hunger-fighting efforts.

Students return for hybrid instruction on campus in Fall.

2022 Students return to campus for in-person instruction.

Interpreting the Audit

Several terms with specific programmatic definitions are used within this report, and are defined below. Please refer to the appropriate definition for each of the referenced data sources.

According to the United States Census Bureau,⁶ a **household** includes all the people who occupy a housing unit (such as a house or apartment) as their usual place of residence. A household includes all of the related family members and all of the unrelated people, if any, such as lodgers, foster children, wards, or employees who share the housing unit. A single person living alone in a housing unit, or a group of unrelated people sharing a housing unit such as partners or roommates, is also counted as a household.

For the purposes of allocating nutritional support services, the United States Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service⁷ defines a **household** as all the people who live together, and who purchase and prepare meals together. **Households** will include some members (such as spouses and most children under age 22) even if they purchase and prepare meals separately. If a person is 60 years of age or older and unable to purchase and prepare meals separately because of a permanent disability, the person and the person's spouse may be a separate household if the others they live with do not have very much income.

The United States Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service⁸ categorizes household food security status into four ranges, defined below:

High Food Security — Households had no problems, or anxiety about, consistently accessing adequate food.

Marginal Food Security — Households had problems at times, or anxiety about, accessing adequate food, but the quality, variety, and quantity of their food intake were not substantially reduced.

Low Food Security — Households reduced the quality, variety, and desirability of their diets, but the quantity of food intake and normal eating patterns were not substantially disrupted.

Very Low Food Security — At times during the year, eating patterns of one or more household members were disrupted and food intake reduced because the household lacked money and other resources for food.

An individual that identifies experiencing high food security or marginal food security is considered to experience **food security**, or be **food secure**; an individual that identifies experiencing low food security or very low food insecurity is considered to experience **food insecurity**, or be **food insecure**.

⁶<https://www.census.gov/glossary/>

⁷<https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/recipient/eligibility>

⁸<https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security>

MSU Student Food Security To Date

Audit Methodology

In 2016, a preliminary student-led survey identified a notable student need for food and other household necessities. This survey raised initial concerns about the state of student food security on campus, and had motivated the University's initial response to addressing this issue. This survey had not utilized the USDA survey module or other comparable standardized scale, and the researchers identified a shortcoming in the information available to guide further program development.

The audit performed during the 2018-2019 Academic Year represents the first attempt at Montclair State University to measure student food security using the USDA's standardized US Adult Food Security Survey Modules. As a result, the authors intend to use this data as a baseline measurement using a standardized tool for comparison to other populations, as well as a comparison for measuring changes in student food security over time.

Recruitment

This audit, released between 2019 and 2022 collected feedback from respondents regarding their level of food insecurity during the academic semester. The study collected a baseline measurement of student food security during the course of an academic term, which is comparable between survey iterations and other measurements using the standardized USDA tools.

During the study period, email invitations to participate in an online survey were sent to all students attending Montclair State University. Potential respondents were invited to take an anonymous online survey, administered via the online survey platform Qualtrics. The survey asked questions that were aimed at identifying food security status during the current semester, as well as identifying student opinions and experiences of the Campus, and surrounding, food environments. The survey was opened 30 days after the beginning of each semester that it was administered, and remained open until the end of instruction and the beginning of the final examination period. Invitations to participate were sent at least twice per semester.

The food security audit was composed of a modified version of the USDA's US Adult Food Security Survey Module, which is intended to be administered to the adults in a given household. The language of the tool was modified in order to better reflect the target audience of college-aged adults, who are more likely to live in a household of one individual, based on the USDA definition provided in the introduction.

Additional questions were added to the survey tool in order to collect demographic traits, assistance program participation rates, and additional information about possible factors impacting student food security, as well as capturing student perceptions of the campus and local food environment. Specific questions about the extent of the COVID pandemic and returns to campus were asked in following survey iterations (2020-2022).

Potential respondents were considered to be eligible to participate in the survey if they were actively enrolled as a student during the academic semester the survey was administered. For this survey, University staff and faculty members were not recruited; however, student workers, such as Graduate Assistants (GA's) or Teaching Assistants (TA's) were eligible, due to their student status. There were no exclusionary criteria for active students.

Student responses to the adapted USDA US Adult Food Security Survey Modules were coded according to the USDA's guidance, in order to determine each respondent's level of food security during the recorded academic semester. Students designated as having high food security or marginal food security were classified as being food secure, while students designated as having low food security or very low food security were classified as food insecure. Definitions of these classifications are provided in the introduction.

Analysis

Statistical tests and analyses were run comparing responses between students who were identified as being Food Secure and Food Insecure using the R language and environment for statistical computing. The results of these analyses are presented in the following sections. All statistical test results are rounded to two digits for ease of presentation.

Student Food Security Status To Date

Between 2018-2022, 3,884 responses were collected from non-unique students who responded to the survey during at least one collection period. During each survey period, respondents were asked about their current food status.

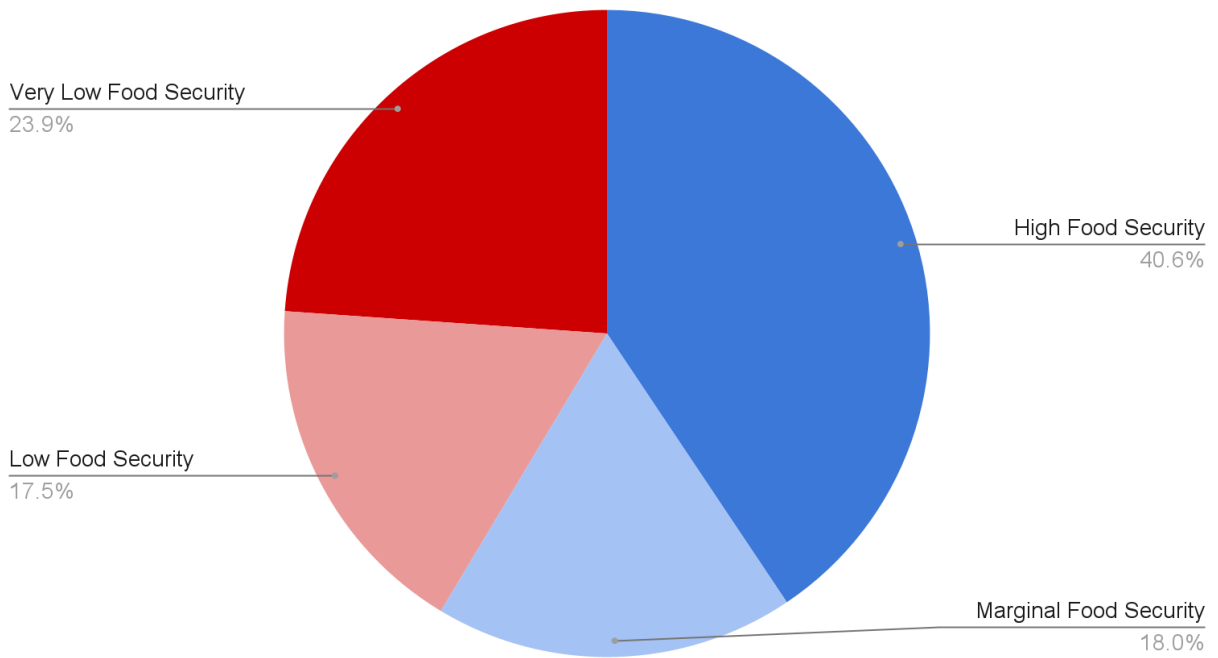
Of the 3,884 respondents, 2,277 (58.6%) students were identified as being food secure during the semester they responded to the survey. Specifically, 1,578 (40.6%) students suggested having high food security and reported no issues with accessing food, and 699 (18.0%) students suggested having marginal food security and reported at least one issue with accessing food, but were still considered to be food secure.

The remaining 1,607 (41.4%) students were identified as being food insecure during the semester they responded to the survey. Specifically, 678 (17.5%) students suggested having low food security and reported reducing the quality of the food that they ate, and 929 (23.9%) students suggested having very low food security and reported reducing the amount of food that they ate.

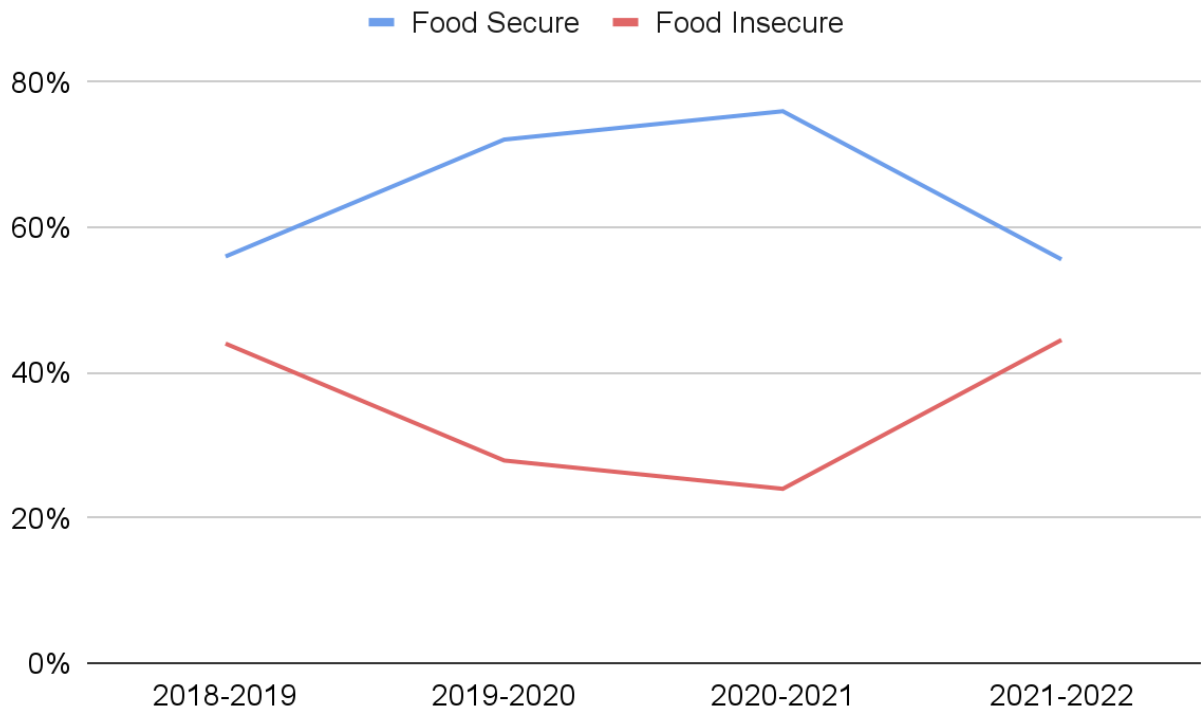
The distribution of student food security status for the duration of the research project has been tabulated below and is graphed on the pages that follow.

Survey Period	High Food Security	Marginal Food Security	Low Food Security	Very Low Food Security
AY 2018-2019	36.2%	19.8%	18.3%	25.7%
AY 2019-2020	54.1%	18.0%	13.8%	14.1%
AY 2020-2021	53.7%	22.3%	13.5%	10.5%
AY 2021-2022	38.5%	17.1%	18.3%	26.2%
Total	40.6%	18.0%	17.5%	23.9%
58.6% Food Secure		41.4% Food Insecure		

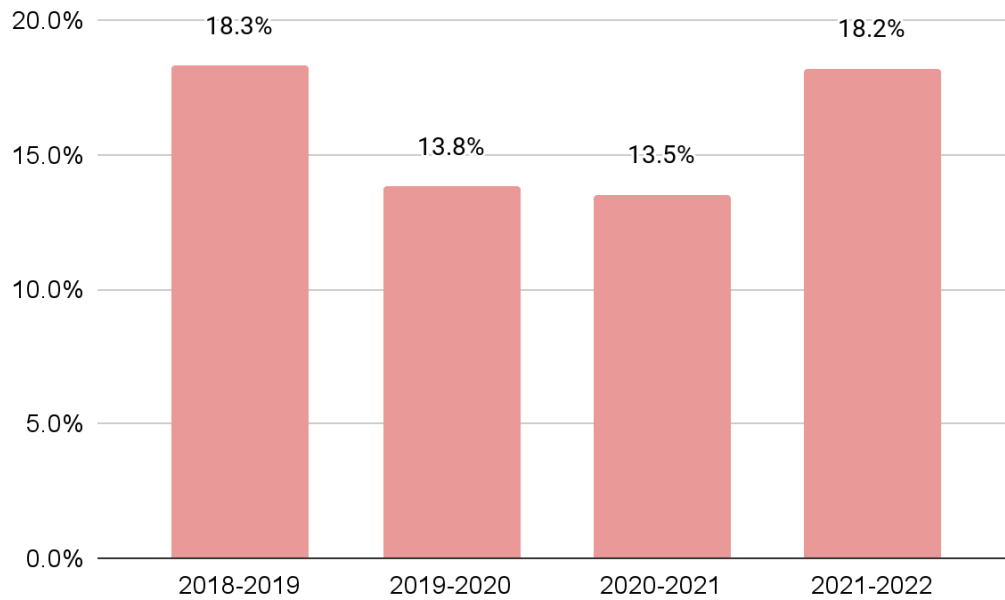
Overall Food Security Status, AY 2018-2019 through AY 2021-2022
N = 3,884



Food Security Levels Over Time, AY 2018-2019 through AY 2021-2022
N = 3,884



Low Food Security, AY 2018-2019 through AY 2021-2022
N = 3,884



Very Low Food Security, AY 2018-2019 through AY 2021-2022
N = 3,884

