



# Research Brief

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## 2023 #RealCollege Survey Results

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The #RealCollege Survey is a national instrument used to assess the level of security of college students' basic needs. The ability to have basic needs met is crucial to the success of college students as there is a strong correlation between these two things. The #RealCollege Survey specifically assesses a student's access to affordable food and housing since not having security in these has been found to be a barrier to student success.

Additional questions were included at the end of the #RealCollege Survey to collect demographic information about each student who completed the survey. Doing this allowed for a more comprehensive interpretation of who is experiencing insecurities in their basic needs.

The #RealCollege Survey was open from March 17 to April 19, 2023. Over 66,000 students from 88 California Community Colleges completed this survey. However, this report will describe the results of the #RealCollege Survey for Santa Monica College students specifically.

### Survey Sample

Results in this report are presented for 1,167 Santa Monica student survey respondents who were 18 years of age and older at the time of the survey administration. A breakdown of the demographics of the survey respondents is presented below (Table1).

Compared to the overall population of Santa Monica College students, this survey had:

- An overrepresentation of female students and an underrepresentation of male students.
- An over representation of Asian students and an underrepresentation of White and Hispanic or Latine/x students.
- There was a similar age break down as 60% of SMC students are typically 25 years of age or younger.

**Table 1. Comparison of Demographics of Survey Sample vs. SMC Credit Population**

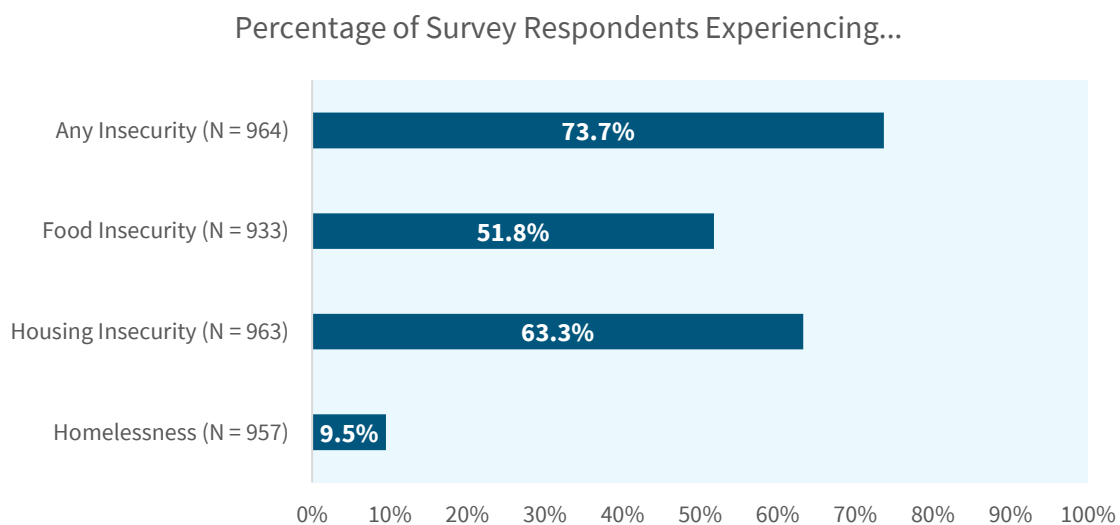
Demographics of Survey Sample Compared to SMC Credit Population		
	Spring 2023 Survey Sample (N = 1,167)	Spring 2023 SMC Credit Students (N = 21,530)
<b>Gender Orientation</b>		
Female	63%	54%
Male	32%	43%
Other Gender Orientation	4%	3%
<b>Racial or Ethnic Background</b>		
African American or Black	8%	9%
Asian	12%	9%
Hispanic or Latinx	30%	39%
Two or More	4%	5%
White of Caucasian	15%	27%
<b>Age</b>		
18 to 20	35%	29% (age <20)
21 to 25	23%	36% (age 20-24)
26 to 30	16%	26% (age 25-40)
Older than 30	26%	26% (age 25-40)

## Results

### PREVALENCE OF BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY

Almost three-fourths of the SMC student survey respondents reported facing at least one basic needs insecurity. Specifically, 52% of students were found to experience food insecurity, 63% were experiencing housing insecurity, and 10% of students who were housing insecure also reported that they experienced homelessness at least once in the last year.

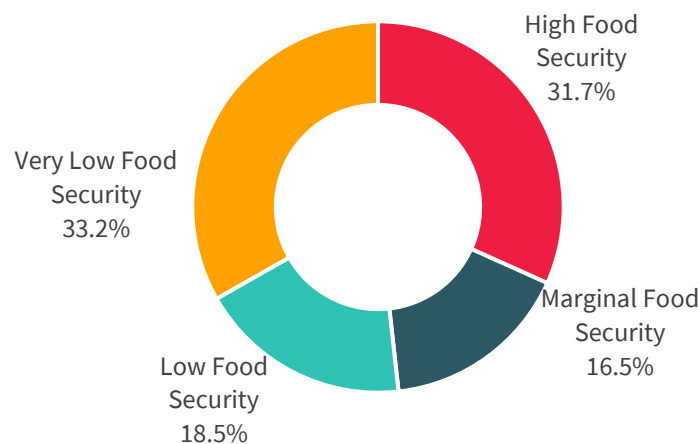
**Figure 1. Basic needs Insecurities Among Santa Monica College Survey Respondents**



## FOOD INSECURITY

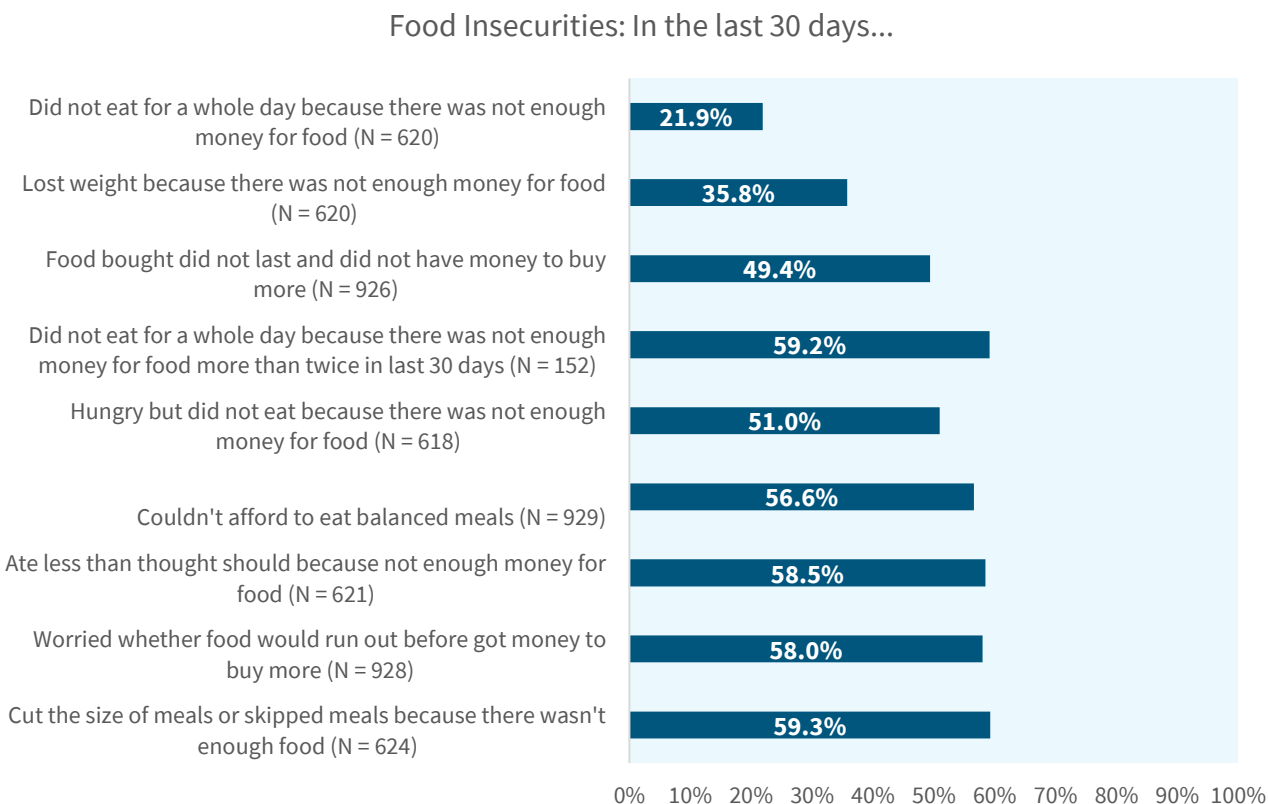
Food insecurity is when someone does not have enough food to fill their hunger and does not know where their next meal will come from ([The Hope Center, 2019](#)). Individuals who are food insecure have uncertain access to a safe food supply with sufficient nutrients. As seen in the graph below (Figure 2), over half of the survey respondents provided responses that indicated they had “very low” or “low” food security.

**Figure 2. Food Security Among Santa Monica College Survey Respondents (N = 933)**



The level of food security that a student had was determined by the total number of questions that a student answered affirmatively to statements related to foods they have eaten in their household in the last 30 days, and if they could afford the food they need. Those questions are presented in the graph below (Figure 3). Over half of the survey respondents indicated that they were hungry but did not eat because there was not enough food, could not afford to eat balanced meals, ate less than they thought they should because there was not enough money for food, worried whether their food would run out before they got money to buy more, and cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there wasn't enough food.

**Figure 3. Percentage Responding Affirmatively to Food Insecurity Survey Item**

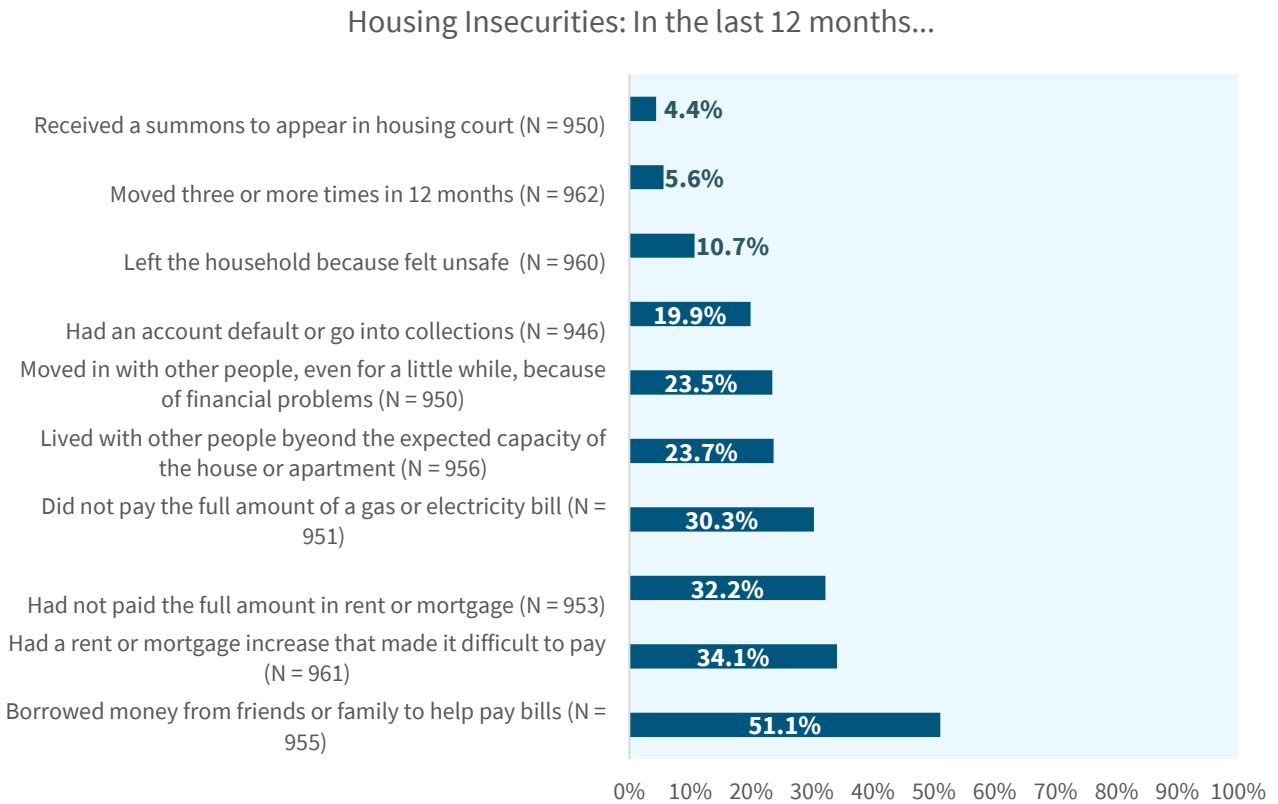


## HOUSING INSECURITY

Housing insecurity means that a student does not have affordable or safe housing, has the need to move frequently, or has an inability to pay rent or utility bills in full (The Hope Center, 2019). Students were considered housing insecure if they had answered yes to any of the following questions: if they had a rent or mortgage increase that made it difficult to pay, if they had any financial related housing issues, if they left their house because they felt unsafe, or if they moved at least three times in the last 12 months. Disproportionately more Santa Monica College students were found to be housing insecure (63%) compared to food insecure (52%).

As seen in the graph below (Figure 4), over half of the survey respondents stated that they had borrowed money from friends or family to help pay bills. Almost one-third of the survey respondents stated that they did not pay the full amount of a gas or electricity bill or had not paid the full amount in their rent or mortgage. One-quarter of the survey respondents indicated that they had lived with people beyond the capacity of the house or apartment, moved in with other people because of financial problems, or had a rent or mortgage increase that made it difficult to pay.

**Figure 4. Percentage Responding Affirmatively to Housing Insecurity Survey Items**

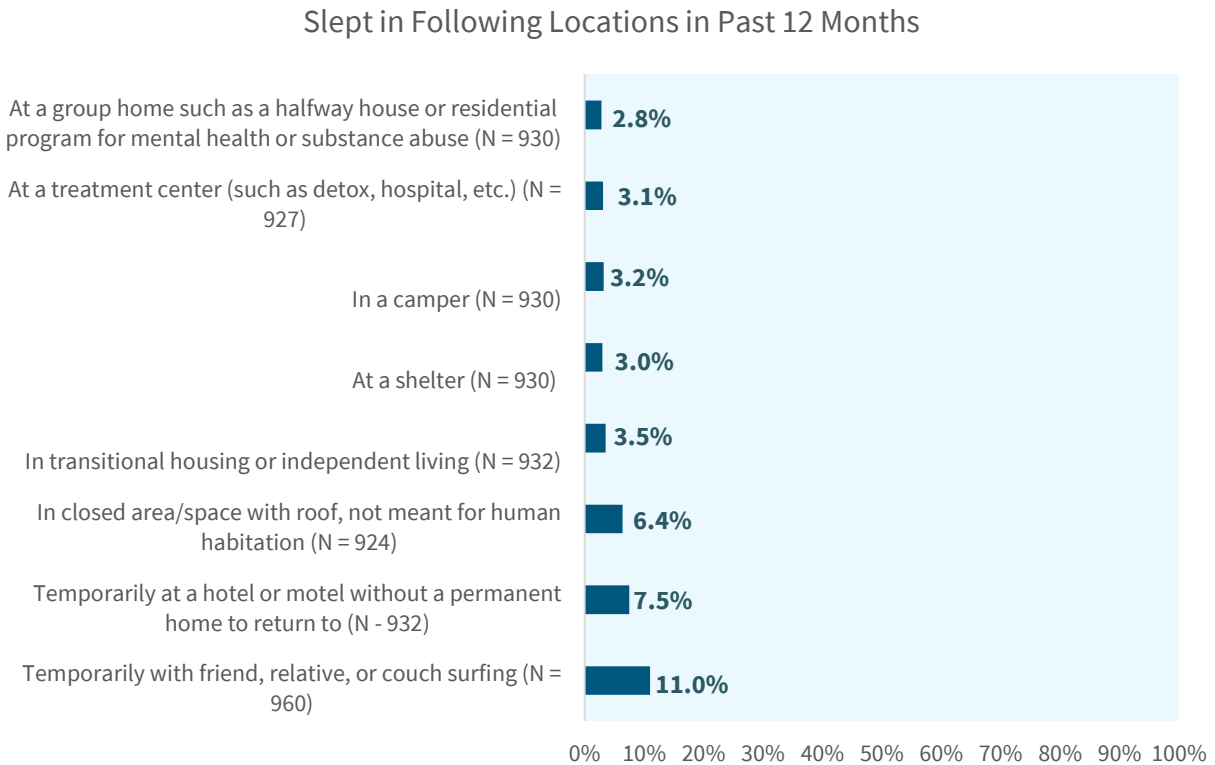


## HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness means that a student does not have a steady place to live. A student was considered homeless if they answered yes to being homeless in the last 12 months. Results showed that 10% of SMC survey respondents were homeless in the previous year.

Additionally, another 15% of survey respondents identified they had living conditions that are associated as homelessness yet did not self-identify themselves as homeless. The most common living condition identified by these students was staying with a friend or relative, or couch surfing.

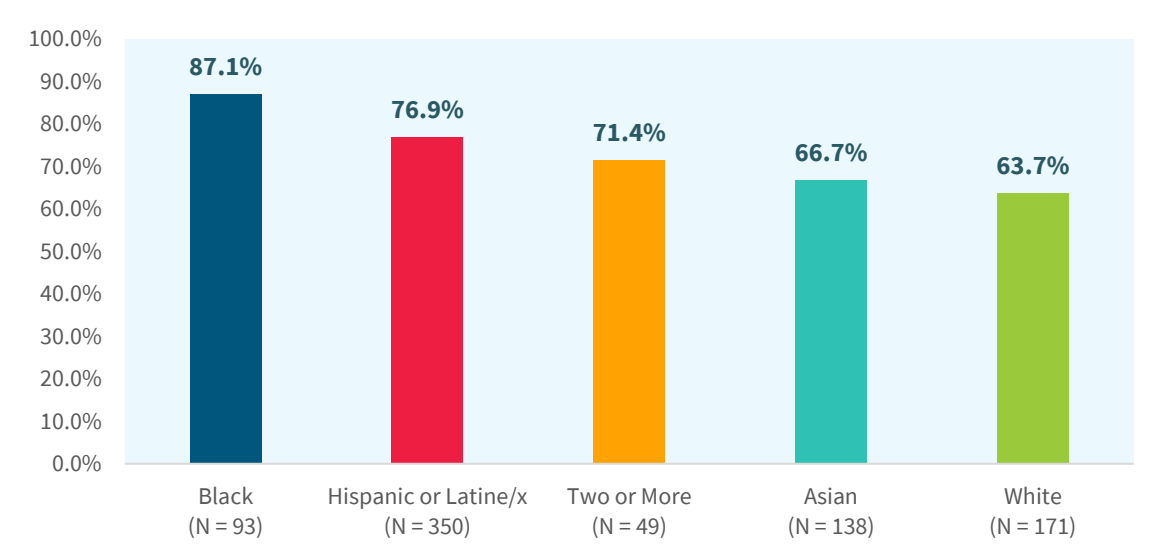
**Figure 5. Percentage Responding Affirmatively to Homelessness Survey Items**



### Basic Needs by Race/Ethnicity

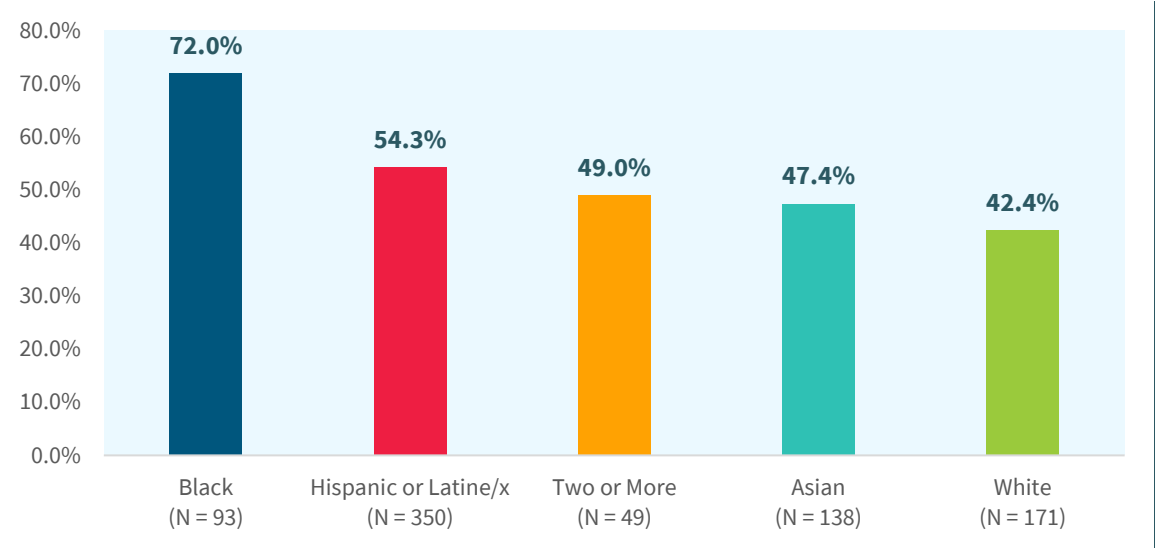
The percentages of survey respondents who experience basic needs insecurities were disaggregated by race/ethnicity. The five largest racial/ethnic categories are included in the data figures.

**Figure 6. Any Basic Needs Insecurity by Race/Ethnicity**



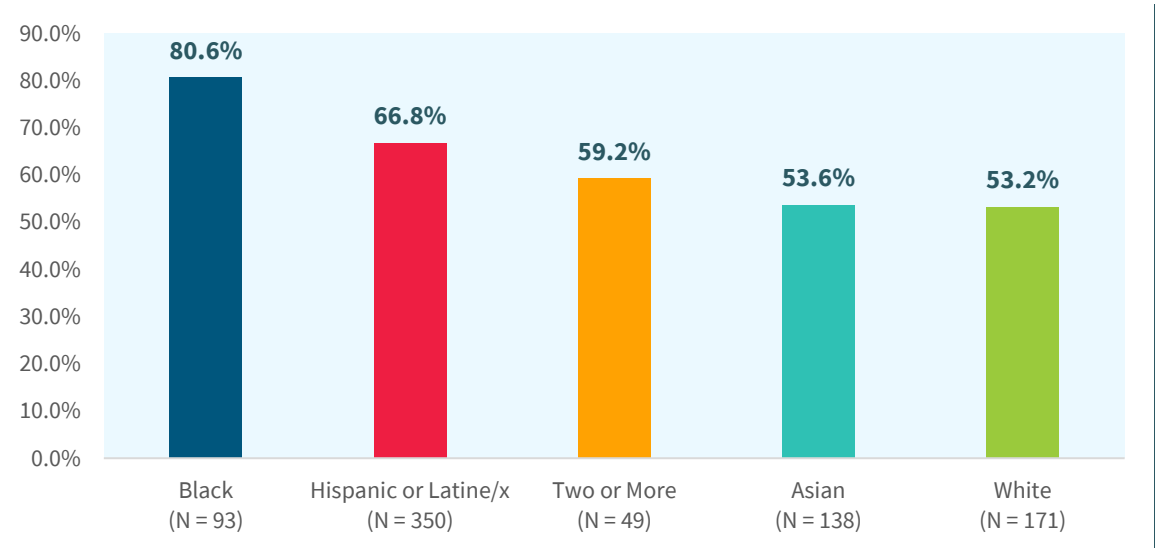
Disproportionately more Black (87.1%) and Hispanic or Latine/x (76.9%) students experienced at least one basic need insecurity or homelessness when compared to multi-racial, Asian, and White students. However, regardless of race/ethnicity, a large majority of all groups reported experiencing basic needs insecurity.

**Figure 7. Food Insecurity by Race/Ethnicity**



Black students experienced food insecurity at much higher rates (7 in 10) than any other racial/ethnic group.

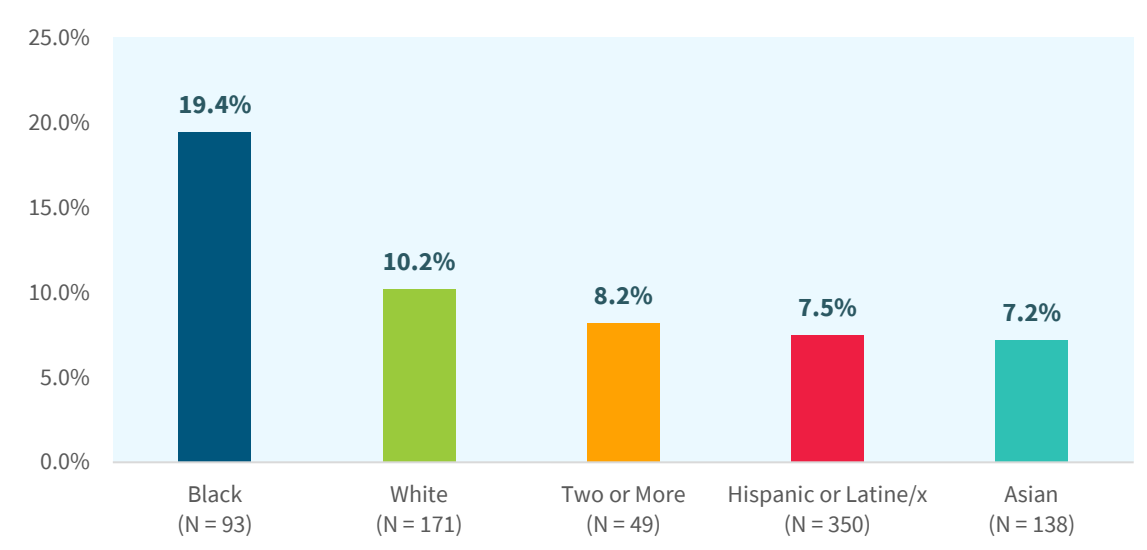
**Figure 8. Housing Insecurity by Race/Ethnicity**



The pattern for housing insecurity is similar to the findings for food insecurity: Disproportionately more Black students, when compared to all other racial/ethnic groups, experienced housing insecurity. Results also indicate that all racial/ethnic groups

experienced higher rates of housing insecurity when compared to the proportion experiencing food insecurity.

**Figure 9. Homelessness (Self-Identified) by Race/Ethnicity**



Approximately two in ten Black students who participated in the survey self-identified as experiencing homelessness at least once in the last 12 months. Disproportionately more Black students were homeless when compared to other racial/ethnic groups with Black students experiencing homelessness about double the percentage of other groups.

## Summary

Overall results of the survey showed that the majority of SMC students experience food or housing insecurities. Specifically:

- Altogether, one-quarter of survey respondents were homeless in the past year or had living conditions that were associated with homelessness.
- Black students experience the greatest food and housing insecurities.
- Importantly, this survey revealed that a larger percentage of students at SMC experience housing insecurities than food insecurities, which is significant because there is a strong relationship between insecure housing, including homelessness, and persistence and completion rates.