



Rio Hondo College HOPE Scholars Assessment Final Report



Center for Equitable Higher Education
To study and promote economic, food, and housing justice

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Executive Summary

Basic needs insecurity continues to deeply affect California Community College (CCC) students, with 47% of CCC students reporting food insecurity, 58% reporting housing insecurity, and 24% experiencing homelessness. Specifically, of the vibrant Rio Hondo College (RHC) student population, about 47% of RHC students reported food insecurity, 55% reported housing insecurity, and 21% identified as experiencing homelessness. This study explores the implementation and student experience of the Rio Hondo College HOPE Scholars Program, an innovative and exemplary program developed to address these pressing basic needs for students.

Key Findings

Findings showed that study participants had a variety of backgrounds, and overwhelmingly had positive experiences with HOPE Scholars; highlighting supportive staff and program offerings. Many students credited the program for their retention and well-being at Rio Hondo College and recommended areas for growth.

Program Accessibility

Most participants found HOPE Scholars through a referral from campus services serving marginalized populations. Others learned of it through peer networks or online. Many found the HOPE Scholars application process quick, easy, and smooth due in part to responsive and accessible staff. Few students noted confusion when applying for the program or barriers to HOPE Scholars based on their age, caregiving responsibilities, or GPA.

Proactive, Student-Centered Engagement

Relationships with staff were repeatedly recounted as key to the success of HOPE Scholars, as most participants described staff as approachable and knowledgeable. Staff provided emotional, social, and academic support along with one-on-one counseling, CalFresh application assistance, job searching assistance, financial assistance, advocacy, and referrals. HOPE Scholars positively influenced students' mental health, as staff helped participants feel less anxious about navigating personal and academic challenges and contributed to their overall sense of belonging.

HOPE Scholars Addresses Many Student Needs and Strengths

Study participants indicated that HOPE Scholars positively influenced their ability to focus on their education by providing housing, easing financial stress, and addressing their educational, mental, and physical well-being. Participants shared that HOPE Scholars helped them persevere through hardships, earn better grades, and graduate on time.

The housing resources HOPE Scholars provided were a fundamental and critical support to the retention and persistence of study participants. About 41% of study participants reported having experienced homelessness, 46.15% reported experiencing a rent or mortgage increase that made it difficult to pay, and 46.15% reported not paying the full amount of a utility bill. HOPE

Scholars provided housing at Whittier College dormitories and offered stipends for appliances and furniture. Students also received support in obtaining Section 8 housing, finding outside resources to help pay for rent, and housing navigation.

HOPE Scholars also influenced participants' financial well-being through scholarships, textbook vouchers, employment support, financial literacy, and CalFresh application assistance. This was of particular importance given that 50% of study participants experienced extreme stress related to their finances, and 41% reported financially supporting their parents, siblings, and/or partners while enrolled in college.

Key Recommendations

The Rio Hondo College HOPE Scholars serves as a model for community colleges. Given the limited number of programs to address homelessness in higher education, and even fewer that have been assessed, the results of this research serve as guidance both for Rio Hondo College and for programs and services across the country.

- **HOPE Scholars must receive robust funding to sustain and grow its offerings to students.** Participants in this study were reflective of many students who experience housing insecurity and homelessness, and the program clearly plays a critical role in student success. In order to continue to address the need for student housing, HOPE Scholars must have the resources needed to maintain this comprehensive approach. Fiscal resources would enable the retention of highly trained staff, appropriate space to carry out programs, and strengthen sustainability.
- **Maintain the high level of staff and administrator expertise and trauma-informed care.** HOPE Scholars staff and administrators are critical to programmatic success. Any effective program development must recognize the essential nature of well-trained,

trauma-informed staff. Clear and persistent communication promoted the retention, transfer, or graduation of student participants.

- **Clarify access points and eligibility requirements.** Programs must include strategies for clear, transparent, and effective access to students who are most likely to experience homelessness and housing insecurity, and overall, HOPE Scholars appears to be achieving this goal. Transparency in eligibility requirements, exemplifying how HOPE Scholars is equitably meeting the strengths and needs of all students, can help students understand why they may or may not be eligible for services.
- **Provide online processes when possible.** Some students indicated that they needed to appear in person to receive meal vouchers, which at times, precluded them from accessing this resource. HOPE Scholars is encouraged to provide this and other services online to improve access.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	5
Literature Review	6
Homelessness and Housing Insecurity and Their Impacts on Students	6
Rio Hondo College HOPE Scholars	7
Purpose of Study	7
Methodology	8
Findings	9
Study Sample	9
Finding the Way to HOPE	10
Participating in HOPE Scholars	11
Application Process	11
Eligibility and Availability for HOPE Scholars	11
Helping Relationships between Staff and Students	13
Proactive, Student-Centered Engagement	13
HOPE Scholars Program Offerings	15
Housing Matters	15
Meal and Textbook Vouchers	16
Academic Counseling	17
How HOPE Helps	18
Education	18
Financial Well-being	19
Mental and Physical Well-being	20
Student Recommendations	21
Conclusion and Recommendations	22
References	24

FIGURES

Figure 1: Higher Education Housing Continuum	7
Figure 2: Participants with Dependents	12
Figure 3: Age of Participants	12

Figure 4: Participant Hours Worked Per Week	14
Figure 5: Participants Lacking a Safe, Regular, and Adequate Nighttime Place to Stay and Sleep During the Present Term (In the Last 12 Months)	15
Figure 6: Participants Reporting a Rent or Mortgage Increase That Made It Difficult to Pay	15
Figure 7: Participants Reporting Not Paying the Full Amount of a Gas, Oil, or Electricity Bill	15
Figure 8: Participant Food Security	17
Figure 9: Self-Reported Stress and Anxiety Related to Academics/Schoolwork/Grades	18
Figure 10: Self-Reported Stress and Anxiety Related to Finances	19
Figure 11: Participants Financially Supporting Parents, Siblings, and/or Partners While Enrolled in College	19

TABLES

Table 1: Rio Hondo College HOPE Scholars Study Demographics	9
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Appendices 26

Appendix A: Supplemental Tables and Figures	26
Table A1: Rio Hondo College HOPE Scholars Participant Identities	26
Table A2: Rio Hondo College HOPE Scholars Housing Security	27
Figure A3: Participants with Dependents	28
Figure A4: Self-Reported Stress and Anxiety Related to Academics/Schoolwork/Grades	28
Figure A5: Self-Reported Stress and Anxiety Related to Finances	29
Figure A6: Self-Reported Experience of Anxiety, Fear, Worries, Nervousness	29
Figure A7: Self-Reported Stress and Anxiety Related to Symptoms of Depression	29
Appendix B: Participants' Reported Helpfulness of Rio Hondo College Services	30
Figure B1: Reported Helpfulness of RioSource Room - Food Pantry	30
Figure B2: Reported Helpfulness of Rio Hondo College Child Development Center (Childcare)	30
Figure B3: Reported Helpfulness of Counseling Center	30
Figure B4: Reported Helpfulness of Extended Opportunity Programs & Services (EOP&S)	30
Figure B5: Reported Helpfulness of UndocuScholars	31
Figure B6: Reported Helpfulness of PRIDE Scholars	31
Appendix C: Semi-Structured Protocols	32
Appendix D: Survey Questions	35

Introduction

Higher educational administrators in the United States are becoming more cognizant of the need to address basic needs insecurity for students, but many find particular difficulty in addressing the specific needs of those who experience homelessness and housing insecurity on college campuses. However, basic needs insecurity is a persistent social problem in college. In the U.S., 41% of students experience food insecurity, 48% experience housing insecurity, and 14% experience homelessness (The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs, 2025). Percentages are even higher among California Community College (CCC) students, with 47% reporting food insecurity, 58% reporting housing insecurity, and 24% experiencing homelessness (Community College League of California, 2023).

Specifically, amongst the vibrant Rio Hondo College (RHC) student population, about 46.9% of RHC students reported food insecurity, 55.5% reported housing insecurity, and 20.9% identified as experiencing homelessness (Real College California, 2025). Food insecurity and housing security data have decreased since those reporting in 2019, 53% food insecurity, 66% housing security respectively, with a rise in homelessness from 16% (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019). Though prevalence cannot show causality, these changes have very positive implications for strategies utilized at RHC.

To address the persistent issues of basic needs insecurity amongst students, the State of California has invested ongoing funds across its public post-secondary institutions to address student basic needs insecurity (Legislative



Analyst's Office, 2024). In 2021, California AB 128 allocated CCCs \$30 million annually to implement basic needs centers and basic needs coordinators, along with \$100 million in one-time funding for food and housing security efforts (John Burton Advocates for Youth, 2021). These investments, along with other public and private dollars, are fundamental for providing emergency grants, housing, and case management to college students.

Though public California colleges and universities have invested time and resources to developing and implementing programmatic responses to student basic needs insecurity, very few of these programs have been assessed. This study explores the implementation of the Rio Hondo College HOPE Scholars and how student participants described the program's influence on their educational experience, mental and physical health, and financial well-being.

Literature Review

Homelessness and Housing Insecurity and Their Impacts on Students

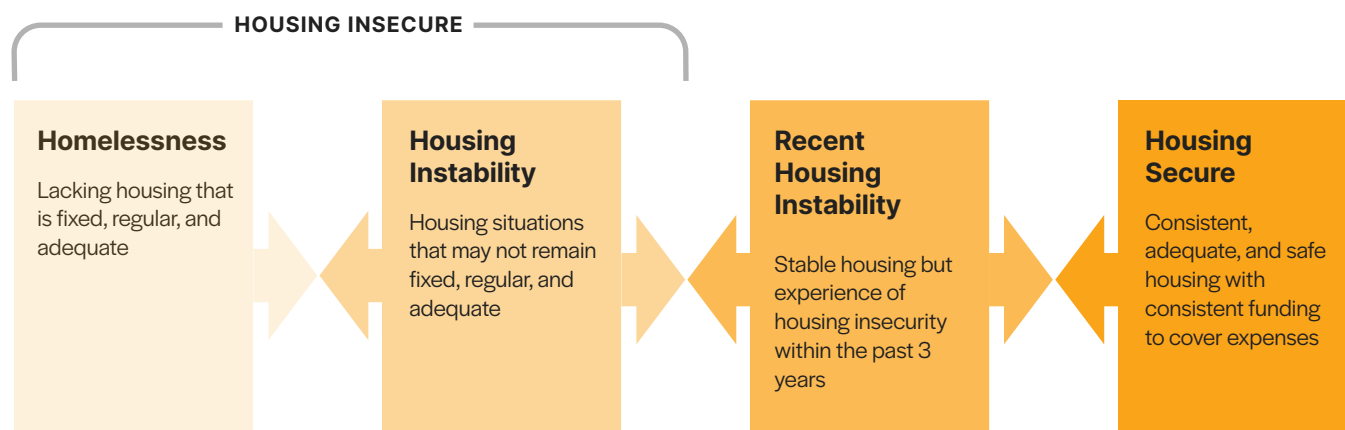
The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) narrowly defines homelessness as living in shelters or in locations not meant for human habitation (Hallett et al., 2019). The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento Act) provides a more inclusive definition of homelessness that is used in education, namely, the lack of fixed, regular, and adequate housing, which is inclusive of the HUD definition, but adds those who are doubled up or couch or dorm surfing. Hallett et al. (2019) proposed the Higher Education Housing Continuum framework to provide further clarity of the experience of homelessness and housing insecurity for students pursuing postsecondary education.

This framework illustrates the nonlinear and ongoing impacts of homelessness on students. Students experiencing housing instability live in situations that may not remain fixed, regular, and adequate (Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017). Those with recent housing instability may have achieved stable housing but have experienced housing insecurity within the past three years. Students who have experienced any of these circumstances can become securely housed, having consistent, adequate, and safe housing with funding to cover expenses. However, the experience of homelessness and housing security can have

long-term impacts on students' mental, physical, and educational well-being. This suggests that programs intended to address housing insecurity and homelessness must integrate trauma-informed practices that respond to students as they move between different housing circumstances during personal or financial crises.

Food and housing insecurity are prominent amongst college students, and the challenges that arise from having unmet basic needs negatively influence multiple facets of life. Unhoused students reported poorer mental and physical health than students who were housed and often face challenges balancing course work with multiple jobs to make ends meet (The Center for Equitable Higher Education [CEHE], 2025). Students who reported food insecurity, homelessness, or both tend to have lower GPAs than their financially secure counterparts and may experience academic difficulties as they worry about affording food or finding a place to stay (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018). Further, there are demographic disparities amongst those who experience homelessness and housing insecurity in higher education. Women, caregiving students, African American, Southeast Asian, and multiracial students have been found to experience higher rates of housing insecurity. Students older than 25 are more likely to experience homelessness than their younger peers (Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017). Despite these barriers, students show profound resilience and resourcefulness as they persist through college (Hallett et al., 2019).

To engage the strengths and meet the needs of students who experience homelessness, research has shown some benefits of identifying a single

FIGURE 1**Higher Education Housing Continuum**

Source: Hallet & Crutchfield, 2017

point of contact (SPOC), or centralized resource hubs for students (Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017; Hallett et al., 2018). These programs can create a welcoming and inclusive environment for students by reducing the amount of time needed to search for support, reducing stigma associated with seeking services, and acting as a convening or collaborative entity, streamlining access to on- and off-campus programs.

Rio Hondo College HOPE Scholars

Rio Hondo College (RHC), located in Whittier, CA, has a largely Latine (72%) population (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System [IPEDS], 2023). 58% of full-time students were Pell eligible (IPEDS, 2022; National Center for Education Statistics, 2022).

Rio Hondo College HOPE Scholars was created in 2018 under the provisions of AB 801 but received full funding from the Department of Education Post Secondary for Basic Needs Award in January 2021 (A.B. 801, 2025). HOPE Scholars was developed to address the holistic needs of students who are transitionally unhoused or experiencing homelessness. Student-focused

and modeled after Guardian Scholars, CalWORKs, and Extended Opportunity Programs & Services (EOP&S) programs, HOPE Scholars implements strategies to provide students with housing and food relief along with advising services that include financial, psychosocial, emotional, and academic support (Rio Hondo College, 2025). HOPE Scholars' two interrelated goals are to "(1) increase institutional capacity to address the needs for additional academic preparation and holistic support programs specifically for unhoused and transitionally unhoused students, and (2) strengthen cross-agency coordination and community engagement to improve student success, retention, persistence, and completion on an increasing scale."

Purpose of Study

This study was developed to better understand the experiences of students served by Rio Hondo College's HOPE Scholars, how the program provides its services, how those services influence the experiences of student participants, and identify areas of growth to support student success including retention, persistence, and graduation. This assessment serves to inform Rio Hondo College as it supports students facing housing insecurity or homelessness.

Methodology

In collaboration with RHC HOPE Scholars staff and administrators, 27 students were recruited to participate in this study. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit students 18 years old and over that were currently or previously enrolled in HOPE Scholars. Program staff conducted initial recruitment utilizing flyers and emails drafted by the research team. Students who expressed interest in participation received an informed consent form and were scheduled for data collection.

Students participated in a 60-minute interview or 90-minute focus group in Spring 2025 using a semi-structured protocol to facilitate discussion (Appendix C). Questions focused on the HOPE Scholars implementation process and experience. To protect confidentiality, participants were asked to provide a pseudonym. Participants were given gift card incentives for their participation. In addition, quantitative data were collected through a survey which was completed at the start of the interview or focus group. Survey questions included demographics, education and enrollment, employment, indicators of food, housing and financial security, supports and services accessed on- and off-campus, subjective social status, and health and well-being (Appendix D).

Researchers used thematic analysis to analyze qualitative data. This method offers theoretical flexibility and helps identify themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Qualitative data were transcribed and then coded and analyzed using Dedoose. Transcripts were independently coded and then triangulated amongst researchers to



ensure inter-rater reliability. Descriptive analysis of quantitative data examined demographic indicators as well as education and enrollment, employment, indicators of food, housing and financial security, supports and services accessed on- and off-campus, subjective social, financial, and health and well-being status.

Findings

Findings showed that study participants had a variety of backgrounds, yet often had similar positive experiences with HOPE Scholars. Findings explored how students found the program and reflected largely positive experiences participating in a variety of programmatic offerings. Study participants overwhelmingly noted the care and commitment of HOPE Scholars staff, discussed the importance of HOPE Scholars in their retention at Rio Hondo College, and the improvement of their overall well-being. Study participants also offered recommendations for areas for program growth.

Study Sample

Of the total sample (N=27), over half of the students identified as female (55.56%), 18.52% as male, and 25.93% as gender nonbinary, genderqueer, or gender nonconforming. Regarding race and ethnic identity, 51.85% identified as Latine, 37.04% Bi- or multi-racial, 7.41% African American or Black, and 3.70% White. In addition, 44.44% of the total sample was between the ages of 25-34, followed by 18-24 years old (37.04%) (Table 1). The majority of the sample identified as first-generation college students (88.89%). Study participants also shared multiple identities including indicating that they were transfer students (56%), LGBTQIA+ (60%), and/or students with a disability (45.83%) (Appendix A1).

TABLE 1
Rio Hondo College HOPE Scholars Study
Demographics

Total Participants		N=27	
Race/Ethnicity	f	%	
Latine (Guatemalan, Costa Rican, Mexican, etc.)	14	51.85%	
White (Irish, German, etc.)	1	3.70%	
African American/Black	2	7.41%	
Multi/Bi-racial	10	37.4%	
Gender	f	%	
Male	5	18.52%	
Female	15	55.56%	
Gender Nonbinary, Genderqueer, or Gender Nonconforming	6	25.93%	
Age	f	%	
18-24	10	37.04%	
25-34	12	44.44%	
35-44	3	11.11%	
45-54	2	7.41%	

Finding the Way to HOPE

It was evident that most participants found HOPE Scholars as a result of a referral from other services on campus, particularly those that serve marginalized populations. Often, participants indicated that they were referred to HOPE Scholars from Rio Hondo College Corps, Rise Scholars, RioSource room, and Guardian Scholars programs. The close links between support services appeared to form an on-campus continuum of care or interconnected web of services to meet the complex and intersectional strengths and needs of students. This was exemplified by Dani, who said,

I found the poster for College Corps, and I applied and got accepted into the program... when I was telling [my coordinator]...I was working and then I lost my job around at the end of the summer semester...she was like, "...Why don't you try to see HOPE Scholars because they can help you with food? They can help you with book things." She actually told me about HOPE and she told me about EOP. I've never heard about that, even when I was at Cerritos. ...It was more like she already knew about the programs ... She was like, "You need this, just apply, talk to [a case manager] and they will guide you what you have to do."

In particular, the seamless access between HOPE Scholars and the RioSource pantry and other programs made a significant difference for participants. Sally, who had experienced a traumatic event, spoke about how embraced she felt by campus programs, saying,

I had a village. I was like, "Damn, these people really do got me." ...Then next thing I was on campus with nothing [but what] I was wearing, and...they were putting clothes on me. Not just HOPE...but the RioSource Room, everybody. Like I'm literally part of every program at Rio Hondo. Everybody in some way they

helped me...It's crazy to see they know when somebody really needs help and they all put together, not just HOPE, but everybody in that college, the staff. It's just amazing.

Given the close ties between programmatic offerings, many student participants found the interwoven network of programs and services helpful to their college success. Notably, the RioSource Pantry was rated as helpful or very helpful by 96% of respondents (Appendix B1) and the Counseling Center by 82% (Appendix B3). EOP&S was rated very helpful by 66% (Appendix B4) and 56% of participants indicated that Pride Scholars was helpful or very helpful (Appendix B6).

Warm handoffs and comprehensive support from these and other programs to HOPE Scholars suggested that there was shared knowledge and strong relationships between and across program staff. This appeared to ensure that students could access these important resources.

Along with referrals, several students mentioned finding HOPE Scholars through various sources, including internet search and peers. Students said they could complete an interest form and found navigating that process easy and accessible. Many participants discussed the value of social connection, both as a vehicle to find the program and as a part of their experience while in the program. They indicated that they heard about HOPE Scholars from peers and felt compelled to share their knowledge about the program with others they knew needed similar help. As Aron said regarding talking to his friends, "...I was telling them where to go because they didn't know. I— since I was the one who [once] didn't know where to go, I was like, I took it upon myself to make sure they knew where to go."

Students suggested that HOPE Scholars expand its outreach to ensure that all students who needed their services could find them. Again, Aron said, "...how are the students going to know you're there if you're not out at events? If you're not shining a light on yourself, be like, 'We're here to help.'"

Participating in HOPE Scholars

The implementation process of HOPE Scholars, the application, onboarding, and ongoing engagement with students greatly influenced if and how students experienced its services. Participants highlighted the importance of the application process, accessing housing, and navigation of the various support services.

Application Process

Overall, many participants expressed that their experience applying for HOPE Scholars was quick, easy, and smooth. Participants attributed this ease of application to the accessibility of staff during the process. Many participants completed the application in person with staff or felt comfortable calling staff because they were responsive to questions by phone, email, app, or in person. Once submitted, participants indicated that they received responses to their applications quickly, typically in a few days. Of the application process, Sally said, “It was simple....it was just pretty much was self-explanatory.” After being asked about responsiveness, Sally continued, “It was that same day they put me in and they got me vouchers and stuff like that, and they offered me a bunch of help.” Another student, Aron, explained his smooth and comfortable application experience, “...once you fill something out, then you meet with a success coach...She really, really made me feel very comfortable. I think I got an email at the end of the week or a week later saying that I was accepted. So it was pretty quick.”

A few participants mentioned challenges during the application process, including uncertainty about the logistical steps. For example, Victor expressed some confusion regarding office hours and the application process, saying,

...I didn't know what the hours were, so I kept coming and I came twice, then I finally was

like, 'What's going on here? Oh, well, they're closed.' ...Then I got the hours, then I came another two times...It took me like five different visits...Once I finally got her, and she's like, “Oh, honey, like I said,” she's like, “Oh, no, you just do it online.” I was like, “Oh, okay.” Then I just did it like that, and then I'm in. To get to that point, it was a minute.

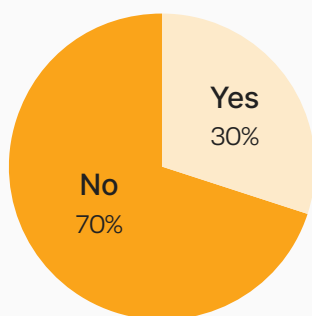
When most successful, participants emphasized that their initial communication with staff during the application process, exemplified by care for their well-being, set the tone for their experiences throughout the program. For example, Isabel explained how a staff member reached out to her when she missed an important orientation. She said, “I think [HOPE Scholars staff] just called me...I just remember, I got the phone calls, and they just kept coming, HOPE. I was just like, okay, I'm with them.” The persistence and caring of staff in the application process set a tone for many participants who may have been initially hesitant to apply.

Eligibility and Availability for HOPE Scholars

Overwhelmingly, participants were grateful and found the program to be supportive and beneficial. Many students indicated that they were found eligible for the program based on their status of housing insecurity or experiencing homelessness. A few students noted barriers that limited the full access of the program. In particular, several participants indicated that they were not clear about the eligibility requirements. Emily highlighted her confusion of how the program defined homelessness or housing insecurity.

It's still wonky [chuckles]. I had applied online. They have a template you fill out and it sends it to them via email and then they get back to you. I've done that twice in the past year now and have spoken to some individuals who are in charge of that here on campus. I was told that because I'm technically living in a place, not actual a street or anything, I'm technically

FIGURE 2
Participants with Dependents



not considered homeless or housing insecure and so it's been a struggle trying to get into the HOPE Scholars program for me.

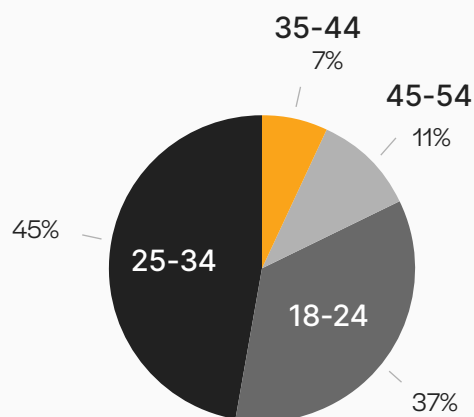
Additionally, Xavier spoke about wanting more clarity about eligibility and process for the Whittier dormitory housing. He said,

...She wasn't able to help me, I guess in the way that I wanted. It's not like it's her fault. I think she could have communicated with me better...what I wanted was a Whittier College dorm. I don't know if they do that anymore. But yeah they were offering or they had some dorms at Whittier College dormitory housing that they were offering to students. That would have been ideal for me at the moment, but the only thing she could offer was like shelters and like yeah I'm not— like I'd rather stay in my car than at a shelter.

Several participants shared that the GPA requirements did not fit the program's mission of student access. Trina felt that the GPA requirement seemed to change indiscriminately and attributed this to race. She said,

The requirements, it was like they made the requirements to fit certain situations...I had a

FIGURE 3
Age of Participants



Black student that was housing insecure, that qualified to be a member of HOPE Scholar, but then it was like, "Oh, well, your GPA is not a 2.7, a 2.0," and I'm like, "How do you expect their GPA to be that and they don't know where they're going to sleep at? ...especially when you see this student walking around campus with their suitcase, and their appearance, you can see that they need help but it wasn't there.

Those with dependents (Figure 2) and returning participants also mentioned barriers to housing support. Notably, 45% of participants were between the ages of 25-34 years old (Figure 3). As Sally highlighted, "...I was part of the program, but the program has certain things that they offer, and most of them I was aged out of. Like, it was only up to 24 years old, or 25...Then, I was 32. I was too aged out for any of these programs." Relatedly, it was notable that very few participants indicated that they utilized the Rio Hondo College Child Development Center (Appendix B2).

Helping Relationships between Staff and Students

Participants overwhelmingly indicated that relationships with HOPE staff were fundamental to success and that they returned to HOPE Scholars repeatedly because of those relationships. Most participants reported receiving emotional, social, and academic support along with one-on-one counseling, CalFresh application assistance, job searching assistance, financial assistance, advocacy, and referrals from staff. Many students described staff as knowledgeable about services and as trusted sources of connection. The trauma-informed care of HOPE Scholars staff also helped streamline participants' access to on- and off- campus basic needs support.

Students described staff as welcoming, easy to talk to, relatable, and people who “just get it.” Staff created a supportive environment that minimized the stigma of basic needs insecurity, which encouraged students to ask for help and share what was going on in their lives. As Dani said,

It's easier for you to communicate to them. It's easier to tell them something. You don't have to overexplain what is going on because they know what it feels. It's like, I don't have to explain to you why I need a meal voucher. For me at least, it's just like I don't have to overexplain myself, what is going on. At least for me, that helps.

When asked what makes HOPE Scholars staff special, Erika stated,

[HOPE Scholars staff are] active listeners. They're not just like, “Oh, later.” They humanize things to where it's like, okay, you're talking to a friend. You're talking to a person....I think it's really important to meet a student where they're at as well. I think they've always created that.

Proactive, Student-Centered Engagement

Other students reported staff were available throughout the week and welcomed people to drop in. Erika stated, “[HOPE Scholars staff] has always been [an] open door...[HOPE Scholars staff is] in this office for 30 minutes and she'll have like 5 students come up to her and be like, “Oh, can you help me with this....” [HOPE Scholars staff] has created that environment [where] students literally just come up to her...which is overwhelming for her, I'm sure, but you know she's always there.”

They humanize things to where it's like, okay, you're talking to a friend. You're talking to a person....I think it's really important to meet a student where they're at as well.

— ERIKA

Numerous participants expressed that HOPE Scholars staff were well-equipped to work with students with various backgrounds and identities. A common sentiment was that staff made participants feel like they could succeed academically and identified support to ensure their success. As Aron mentioned, “...I got an email saying that I could buy my supplies, so that was it. They're very, very helpful and very, very quick. They're on the ball.” Similarly, when his Section 8 voucher had expired, Charles shared, “[HOPE Scholars staff] helped me and reached out to Section 8 Housing personally and helped me achieve getting that back with an extension. And I have now been housed for a couple months.”

Many students shared that staff supported them beyond basic needs. Exemplifying a trauma-informed approach, one student with a disability

[HOPE Staff] are probably the most dedicated to the students, and I feel like in return students have become more dedicated to their education and to finding different ways of improving their own lives financially and with their living situation.

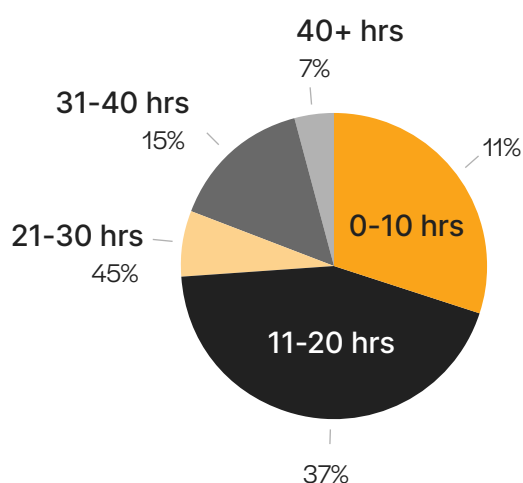
— RAIN

mentioned that staff are very good at caring for their students aside from just getting them school supplies—staff checked in on him to ensure his physical well-being. Another student expressed that HOPE Scholars was her “family away from family.” Most students reported feeling motivated to achieve their educational goals because of HOPE Scholars. As Rain said,

...out of all the programs and staff that I have met on this campus, [HOPE Staff] are probably the most dedicated to the students, and I feel like in return students have become more dedicated to their education and to finding different ways of improving their own lives financially and with their living situation.

Participants often described the high engagement strategies exemplified by HOPE Scholars staff. Many expressed appreciation for the time and effort focused on their needs, often through meetings that would occur weekly, biweekly, or, at least, the mandatory check-in meetings per semester. Students reported communicating and checking in with staff via phone, email, or in person. The check-ins helped participants academically stay on track and establish stronger relationships. Isabel expressed how staff provided her with emotional support during their check-in over the phone. She said, “[HOPE Scholars staff] would call me, and like she would remember. She knew what my situation... It wasn’t just a regular phone call from the school... That’s pretty much the relationship we had...”

FIGURE 4
Participant Hours Worked Per Week



Though some students found the frequency of contact by HOPE Scholars staff as overwhelming and cumbersome when they did not feel a human connection with staff, most perceived this high engagement positively. Some students who had to travel distances to campus shared that it was easy to check in via phone and email. Further, the flexibility in communication methods was beneficial to students who had other time commitments. This appears particularly relevant given that about 44% of study participants reported working 11 to 20 hours per week, 7% reported working 21 to 30 hours per week, 15% reported working 31 to 40 hours per week, and 4% reported working 40 or more hours per week (Figure 4).

HOPE Scholars

Program Offerings

HOPE Scholars provides students with services, referrals, and connections that increase students' ability to prepare for courses and promote their academic progress. HOPE Scholars offerings include housing, textbook and meal vouchers, school supplies, CalFresh application assistance, referrals to on- and off-campus services for food and hygiene products, financial aid and scholarship support, student panels, and individual counseling services. In addition, study participants praised the inclusive community events the program creates for them and their families, such as holiday events and movie nights. Most participants reported that HOPE Scholars offerings positively shaped their time at Rio Hondo College. Three offerings that stood out amongst students in this study were housing services, meal and textbook vouchers, and counseling services.

Housing Matters

HOPE Scholars provided multiple methods aimed to provide housing for students who experienced housing insecurity or homelessness. Participants described housing at the Whittier College dormitories, access assistance to Section 8 housing, resources to help pay rent, and funding for temporary hotel stays. The experiences of study participants clearly indicated that housing resources were critical and fundamental to their success. About 41% of study participants reported having experienced homelessness (Figure 5), 46.15% reported experiencing a rent or mortgage increase that made it difficult to pay (Figure 6), and 46.15% reported not paying the full amount of a utility bill (Figure 7).

FIGURE 5
Participants Lacking a Safe, Regular, and Adequate Nighttime Place to Stay and Sleep During the Present Term (In the Last 12 Months)

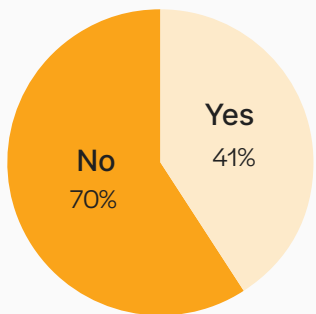


FIGURE 6
Participants Reporting a Rent or Mortgage Increase That Made It Difficult to Pay

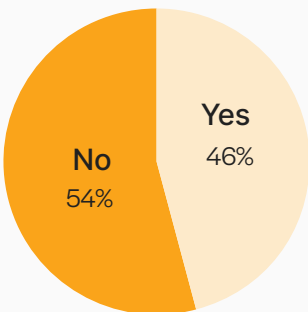
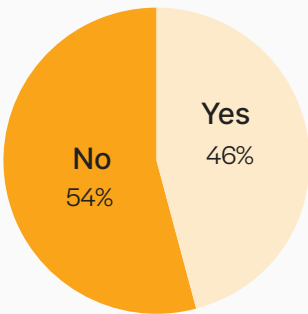


FIGURE 7
Participants Reporting Not Paying the Full Amount of a Gas, Oil, or Electricity Bill



Similarly to the application process, seeking resources for housing for many students was smooth, flexible, and accommodating. Participants who experienced homelessness or persistent housing insecurity recounted their experiences living in the Whittier College dormitories for free or for a small fee and receiving support from housing navigators who helped them connect to other resources. Participants emphasized that staff made efforts to create a welcoming space at the dormitories for students by establishing a communal area that included a couch, refrigerators, kitchen supplies, bathroom essentials, and a foosball table for students to use. Alondra described this effort as “little touches” that make the dormitories “feel like home”.

Some students were able to bypass the initial HOPE Scholars application because their need for housing was so urgent. Alondra described accessing the Whittier College dormitory program:

I did things backwards. The way it's supposed to be is like, you apply to the HOPE program and then the dorms is one facet, or one part of it. I guess just because of how extreme the situation was, they were like, “Okay apply for the housing and then we'll get you into HOPE after.” The HOPE process, the application was pretty easy. They took my statement for my dorm application into account. Mainly, I did an interview with their counselor, [HOPE Scholars counselor]. I love him...For me, it was pretty smooth.

Nicole discussed how proactively staff were in ensuring that she found housing. She said a staff member reached out to her after hearing that she was experiencing homelessness.

I was in the RioSource room and [HOPE Scholars staff] who oversees everything, she came and she was like, “I remember your situation and I have this opportunity. Would you like to live here?” I was like, “Yeah, I would love to.” Then she's like, “Okay.” Then one day I get an email from this lady...I had a quick interview with her. I talked to her. She told me

how everything was going to go...Then it was easy. You just go to the office, pick up your key, and you got your room.

Many participants highlighted that HOPE Scholars financial and housing resources had critical influence on their education trajectory. David shared how staff shared services that would further promote their ability to secure and afford housing.

I just kinda got into housing with the VA [Veterans Affairs] and they were helping me because rent was still ridiculous. Honestly, I don't even think I was affording it at the time and then [HOPE Scholars staff] pushed me to apply for all the other services...So, once those bills started dropping, it became a little manageable. Then [HOPE Scholars staff] help with supplies too, for schools so that eliminates a giant chunk of my cost to better afford housing as well.

Some study participants were deemed ineligible for the Whittier College dormitories because they were over 26 years old or did not meet the program's definition of homelessness or housing insecurity. Other study participants declined Whittier College housing because their dependents could not be housed. This is poignant given that 30% of participants indicated that they had dependents (Figure 2). Participants also expressed wanting to know more about when there were available dormitories at Whittier College.

Meal and Textbook Vouchers

Study participants described the importance of HOPE Scholars meal vouchers, which could be redeemed at participating on-campus vendors. Participants stated that they had once been able to access five to six meal vouchers a week; however, they reported a recent change to one to two meal vouchers a week. Though students acknowledge this aid as “helpful”, other students expressed the current amount of meal vouchers is not enough to sustain themselves. Additionally, students identified challenges in accessing meal

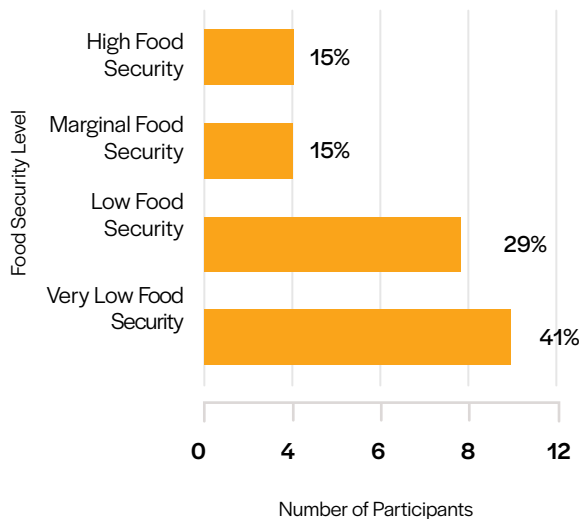
vouchers from staff when they were unavailable. Survey data underscored the persistence of food insecurity, indicating that 70% of participants were food insecure (29% low food security, 41% very low food security) (Figure 8).

Textbook vouchers were also identified as a valuable resource for obtaining required course materials, including traditional materials such as textbooks and course specific materials like art supplies and medical devices. For some students, textbook vouchers were their initial incentive to explore HOPE Scholars, as Angelina stated:

One of the main things that drew me to them is that they help with the cost of textbooks, and depending on how many courses you can take, they give you enough that will pay for all the ones that you need. The money that you do get can go to other things, other bills that you have to pay.



FIGURE 8
Participant Food Security



Academic Counseling

Many participants highlighted the importance of connecting with HOPE Scholars staff and accessing academic counseling services to keep them academically “on track” and connect them to on-campus programs to further promote their academic advancement. Many participants said that staff took time to understand their academic standing and ways to promote their academic success and well-being. Exemplifying this trauma-informed approach, Fresa shared this experience when asked how the program has impacted her grades:

By making sure I attend their expert's counseling. [HOPE Scholars staff] always ask me, how was your grades? Why do you have this grade? I explain it to them because I don't pay attention, because I have anxiety, and they're like, “Well, let's go see how DSPS [Disabled Students Programs & Services] can help you too.” They have other programs to help me, and then for them, they learn from other programs to help other students.

How HOPE Helps

Participants shared that HOPE Scholars influenced them in four key areas: education, housing, financial well-being, and mental and physical well-being.

Education

Many study participants shared that engagement with HOPE Scholars positively influenced their educational experience. The importance of this educational support was underscored by

I think having my own place helped me get that weight off my shoulders and try to — I could focus on my studies more.

— ULIO

survey data that showed that academic-related stress was high for most participants (Figure 9). Having access to textbook vouchers, grants for school supplies and major-specific materials (i.e. laboratory goggles), housing support, and meal vouchers, relieved financial pressure, which allowed them to focus more deeply on their academics. Ulio shared, “I think having my own place helped me get that weight off my shoulders and try to— I could focus on my studies more.” Nicole addressed the impact of food vouchers sharing that, “having access to the food helped so much. Obviously, you can’t concentrate or anything like that if you are hungry.”

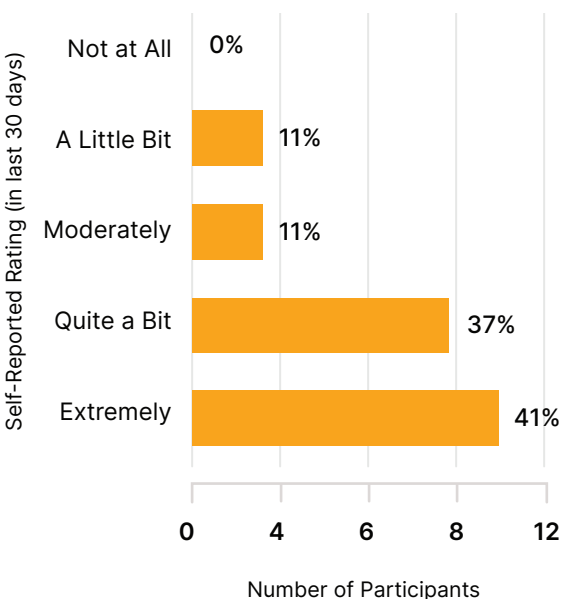
Other participants shared that the guidance, check-ins, study groups, academic planning, and overall motivation provided by HOPE Scholars helped them persevere through hardships, earn better grades, and graduate on time. Cathy shared

that “[HOPE Scholars] made me want to continue learning, because I wanted to give up so many times with all of the bumps in the road. There was people there that helped me, motivate me to continue.” Rain added, “I initially didn’t expect to graduate for another year, but I definitely feel that because they have been super supportive during both my successful and unsuccessful semesters here, it’s kept me motivated.”

Indeed, many participants reported accessing various housing resources through the HOPE Scholars, including a stipend for appliances and household items like refrigerators and furniture. Braulio, who had been living in a van, described how he was supported, “[HOPE Scholars Staff] put me up into a hotel, and she paid me out so I could stay at that hotel. Then they transferred me over to what we have a contract with Whittier College so that I could be able to dorm there.”

Others discussed assistance with obtaining Section 8 housing, navigating instances where their Section 8 voucher was canceled, and finding outside resources to help pay for rent.

FIGURE 9
Self-Reported Stress and Anxiety Related to Academics/Schoolwork/Grades



[HOPE Scholars] made me want to continue learning, because I wanted to give up so many times with all of the bumps in the road. There was people there that helped me, motivate me to continue.

—CATHY

Financial Well-being

HOPE Scholars had great influence on participants' financial well-being through the provision of scholarships and grants, textbook vouchers, employment support, financial literacy workshops, and CalFresh enrollment. This was of particular importance, given that 45% of study participants experienced extreme levels of stress related to their finances (Figure 10), and 41% reported financially supporting their parents, siblings, and/or partners while enrolled in college (Figure 11).

Participants said that HOPE Scholars staff frequently provided information on scholarships and grants and helped them with applications. Once awarded, these grants helped students save for cars, feel financially stable enough to attend a 4-year university, and enable them to graduate without loans. Erika shared her experience:

If I hadn't known about any of these resources, I would not have been able to pay transferring over to Cal State LA. I don't owe Cal State LA anything, and that is with housing as well. I have full tuition covered. And if I hadn't known about how I could get my tuition covered like here, because I got it covered here as well, I would be screwed. Like I would owe so much money.

Despite having textbook vouchers from other programs such as EOP&S, participants often needed to utilize HOPE Scholars textbook

FIGURE 10

Self-Reported Stress and Anxiety Related to Finances

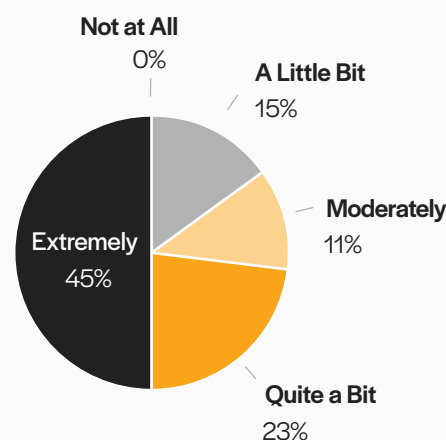
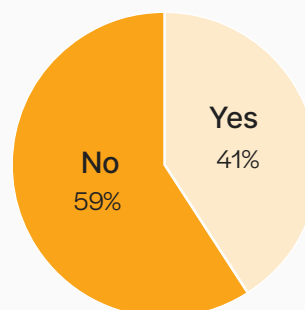


FIGURE 11

Participants Financially Supporting Parents, Siblings, and/or Partners While Enrolled in College



If I hadn't known about any of these resources, I would not have been able to pay transferring over to Cal State LA. I don't owe Cal State LA anything, and that is with housing as well. I have full tuition covered. And if I hadn't known about how I could get my tuition covered like here, because I got it covered here as well, I would be screwed.

— ERIKA

vouchers to pay for all of their books and free up funds for students who had additional class supplies to pay for such as laboratory supplies. Beyond this, HOPE Scholars supported students' financial well-being through assisting with finding employment, providing workshops focusing on financial skills like budgeting and saving, and advocating for them with the financial aid office.

Mental and Physical Well-being

Overall, participants shared that HOPE Scholars positively influenced their mental health. Many participants shared that the program, especially the housing provision, reduced their experience of depression and anxiety, allowed them to feel more comfortable at Rio Hondo College, and fostered a more positive hopeful outlook on life. This is poignant, as survey data showed that 74% of participants reported experiencing anxiety-related symptoms (Appendix A6) and 38% reported experiencing anxiety related to symptoms of depression (Appendix A7).

Gaby described being housed as a "sigh of relief" that helped them finally feel like they did not have to be in "survival mode". Some participants added that having housing allowed them to process through their trauma in a safe place. For some, housing gave them the space to freely express their gender identities. Patty mentioned, "I can dress the way I want. I just forget that. I forgot that. That's the biggest thing. Wait. Wait a second. This is the biggest thing. I am definitely

more openly queer." This was especially notable given that 26% participants identified as gender nonbinary, genderqueer, or gender nonconforming (Table 1).

In addition to housing, participants also attributed improvement to their mental health to HOPE Scholars staff. The support system offered by staff helped participants feel less anxious about navigating personal and academic challenges and contributed to their overall sense of belonging to Rio Hondo College and the larger community.

Participants also discussed how the program supported their physical health. Overall, participants experienced improved sleep after being housed as well as more consistent diets through the program's support with CalFresh enrollment and provision of meal vouchers. This support for food was very important as 41% reported very low food security, 29% reported low food security, 15% reported marginal food security, and 15% reported high food security (Figure 8).

Student Recommendations

Participants overwhelmingly appreciated HOPE Scholars. Along with their praise, study participants offered recommendations that could benefit growth of the program. They strongly encouraged sustainable funding for the program overall, and additional funding for meal vouchers, office space, outreach, and flexible financial resources, particularly for those students in urgent, unsafe housing circumstances. Many students discussed how pivotal meal vouchers were and that increasing available vouchers and removing expirations dates would be very helpful.

Some participants mentioned that the program's physical space would benefit from expansion to allow for more study areas and more space for students to speak openly without being overheard. David mentioned:

I know they do have a kind of a shared space, and it is nice, but it would be nice if they had their own space, especially because their offices are so close to where they have events. It's kinda hard to talk to them and feel safe. Even though we do close the door, it does feel safer that way. I don't know. It's just awkward when I feel like people are listening, but that just might be a military thing.

Additional office space would also allow for HOPE Scholars staff to have their own offices, as described by Sally:

...HOPE deserves its own office. It doesn't deserve to be put in the little foot. You guys are in the college right now. You guys see where the HOPE thing— They need their own office. How is there—like it doesn't make sense. [One staff is] over there and then [another staff is] in this little corner. They need their own office.

Overall, participants expressed the continuous



need for HOPE Scholars resources. They expressed fear that a lack of funding has changed the program's ability to sustain these resources. Angelina expressed their concern on this matter, "Probably the main thing would be that [HOPE Scholars] don't always get the funding that they need. The things that they can help with all of a sudden become very limited, and they can't offer as much as they once were able to."

Some participants noticed a reduction in resources and staff support compared to previous years. As Xavier shared about having difficulty in receiving services. "Sometimes I'll come and their schedules change, and they have certain meetings... so I couldn't get [a meal voucher] for last week... it's hard to catch [HOPE Scholars staff] sometimes."

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Rio Hondo College HOPE Scholars serves as a model for community colleges. Given the limited number of programs to address homelessness in higher education, and even fewer that have been assessed, the results of this research serve as guidance both for Rio Hondo College and for programs and services across the country.

HOPE Scholars must receive robust funding to sustain and grow its offerings to students.

Participants in this study represented experiences of housing insecurity and homelessness from across the Higher Education Housing Continuum (Figure 1, Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017) and the program clearly played a critical role in their success. Nationally, there are very few programs that address homelessness and housing insecurity for students in higher education beyond short-term assistance like small grants or short-term emergency housing (CEHE, 2025). In order to continue to address the growing need for student housing, HOPE Scholars must have the resources needed to maintain sustainability and continue its comprehensive approach. This would support the retention of highly trained staff, appropriate space to carry out programs and services, and strengthen the overall stability of the program.

Maintain the high level of staff and administrator expertise and trauma-informed care.

The staff and administrators of HOPE Scholars are clearly critical to the success of this program. Any effective program development must recognize the essential nature of well-trained, trauma-informed staff. Clear and persistent communication promoted the retention, transfer, or graduation of student participants. Though not all participants felt they needed ongoing meetings, most found this level of engagement as welcoming, effective, and necessary for their success.



Clarify access points and eligibility requirements.

Programs must include strategies for effective and smooth access to students who are most likely to experience homelessness and housing insecurity. Overall, HOPE Scholars appears to be achieving this goal. Most on-campus and community-based programs have eligibility requirements to ensure that students who access support need those services the most. However, flexibility in those requirements allows staff and administrators to make decisions that are specialized to the strengths and needs of students. Clearly providing standard and transparent eligibility requirements while indicating the need to adjust appropriately may help students understand why they may or may not be eligible for services. This could also help exemplify how HOPE Scholars is equitably meeting the strengths and needs of students. Developing both a structure for eligibility while allowing for flexibility to address individual needs is challenging. Lack of clarity was confusing for some students, and transparency about the limitations of resources, communicating clear eligibility requirements, and providing information about exceptions to those requirements can prove helpful both for staff and incoming students who can set clear expectations for the program.

Provide online processes when possible.

Some students indicated that they needed to appear in person to receive meal vouchers, which at times, precluded them from accessing this resource. The program seems to have procedures for when meal vouchers are accessible to students, and some students indicated that this sometimes made the vouchers inaccessible. HOPE Scholars is encouraged to provide this and other services online to improve access.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Supplemental Tables and Figures

TABLE A1

Rio Hondo College HOPE Scholars Participant Identities

Total Participants N=27*

Please check any statement below that you identify with. Check all the apply.	# Answered "Yes"	# Respondents	% Answered "Yes"
I identify as a Transfer Student	14	25	56.00%
I identify as LGBTQIA+	15	25	60.00%
I identify as a former foster youth/child	2	25	8.00%
I identify as a student with a disability	11	24	45.83%
I identify as an International Student	1	23	4.35%
I identify as a non-California resident (not International)	3	25	12.00%
I identify as a first-generation college student	24	27	88.89%
I identify as a student who speaks English as a Second Language	7	25	28.00%
I identify as a Veteran of military service or Active-Duty military personnel	1	25	4.00%
I identify as a student athlete	2	24	8.33%
I identify as a DREAMER (i.e. undocumented) student	1	25	4.00%
I identify as a DACA (i.e. Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) student	1	25	4.00%
I am approved, awarded, or accepted for work study (with or without a work study job)	21	24	87.50%
I identify as a student parent	8	26	30.77%
I identify as a single parent with one or more full-time dependents	6	25	24.00%
I identify as a student who is solely responsible for paying for my living and educational expenses (Please exclude support from financial aid, grants, and scholarships)	24	27	88.89%

*NOTE: Not all 27 participants answered all questions

TABLE A2**Rio Hondo College HOPE Scholars Housing Security**

Total Participants N=27*

Housing Costs In the last 12 months...	# Answered "Yes"	# Respondents	% Answered "Yes"
was there a rent or mortgage increase that made it difficult to pay?	12	26	46.15%
did you not pay the full amount of a gas, oil, or electricity bill?	12	26	46.15%
Sleeping Location In the last 12 months, have you slept overnight in any of the following places?	# Answered "Yes"	# Respondents	% Answered "Yes"
At the house or apartment of foster parent(s)	1	25	4.00%
Temporarily staying with a relative, friend or couch surfing WITH parent/guardian	11	26	42.31%
Temporarily staying with a relative, friend or couch surfing WITHOUT parent/guardian	9	26	34.62%
At a shelter WITH your parent	0	25	0.00%
At a shelter NOT with your parent	1	25	4.00%
In interim (transitional) housing or independent living program WITH a parent/guardian	1	24	4.17%
In interim (transitional) housing or independent living program NOT with a parent/guardian	6	26	23.08%
At a motel WITH a parent or guardian	1	25	4.00%
At a motel NOT with a parent or guardian	3	25	12.00%
In a camper WITH a parent or guardian	0	25	0.00%
In a camper NOT with a parent or guardian	0	25	0.00%
Temporarily at a hotel without a permanent home to return to (not on vacation or business travel)	3	26	11.54%
At a group home such as halfway house or residential program for mental health or substance abuse	1	25	4.00%
At a treatment center (such as detox, hospital, etc.)	1	25	4.00%

Sleeping Location (Continued)	# Answered "Yes"	# Respondents	% Answered "Yes"
Outdoor location such as street, sidewalk, or alley, bus or train stop, campground or woods, park, beach, or riverbed, under bridge or overpass	1	25	4.00%
In a closed area/space with a roof not meant for human habitation such as abandoned building, car or truck, van, RV, or encampment or tent, or unconverted garage, attic, or basement due to lack of adequate accommodations	5	25	20.00%
Other	1	19	5.26%
McKinney-Vento Homelessness	# Answered "Yes"	# Respondents	% Answered "Yes"
In the last 12 months, have you lacked a safe, regular, and adequate nighttime place to stay and sleep during the present term (i.e., semester or quarter)? This would include couch-surfing in other people's homes for temporary sleeping arrangements, single occupying facilities, homeless shelters, campgrounds, motels in vehicles, and living on the street.	11	27	40.74%

*NOTE: Not all 27 participants answered all questions

FIGURE A3
Participants with Dependents

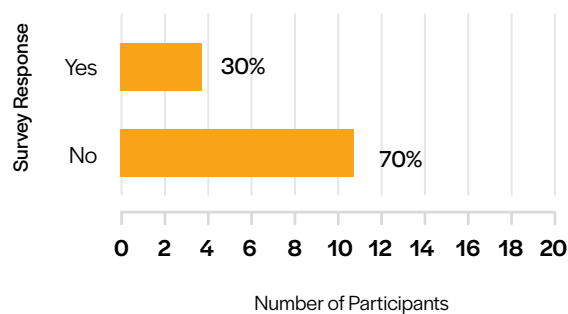


FIGURE A4
Self-Reported Stress and Anxiety Related to Academics/Schoolwork/ Grades

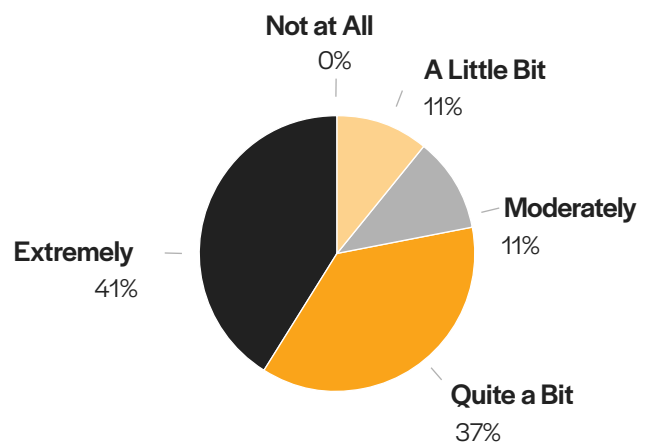
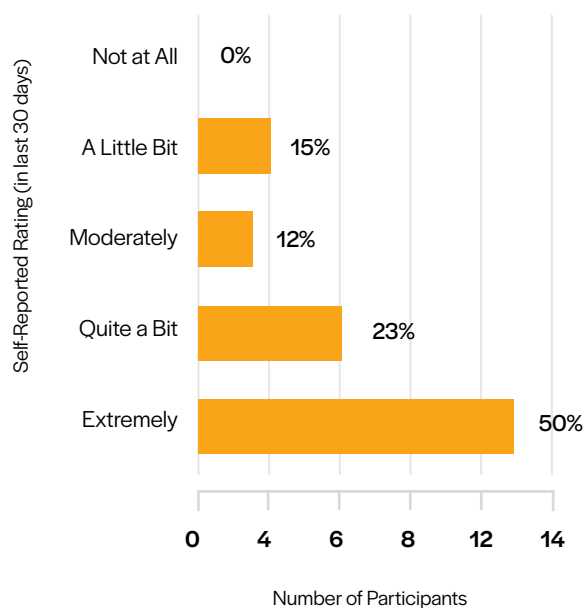
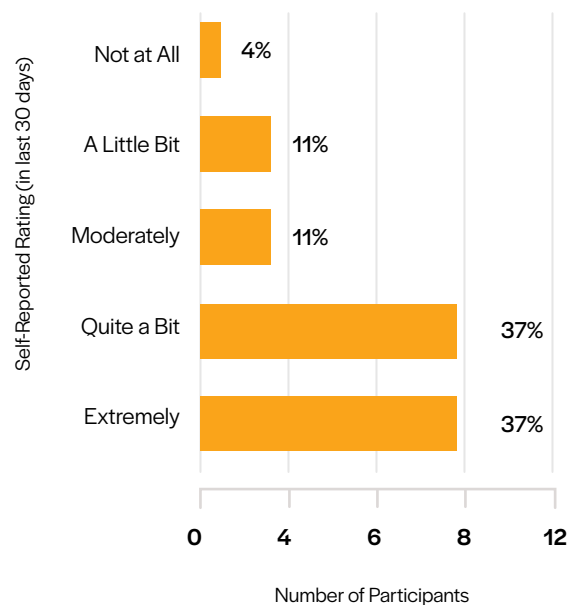
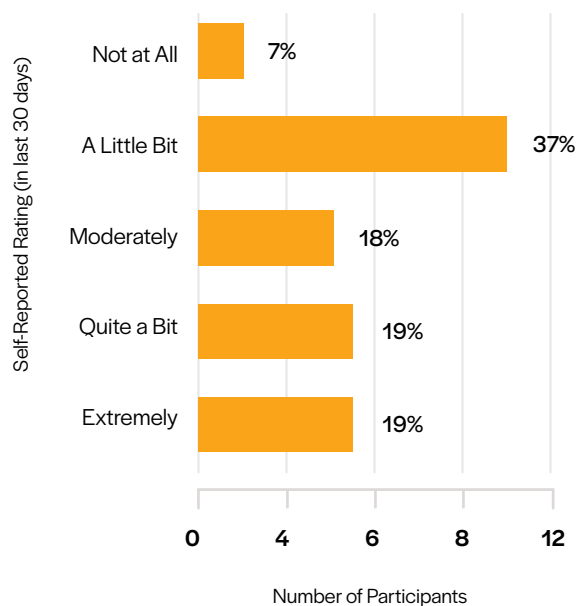


FIGURE A5**Self-Reported Stress and Anxiety
Related to Finances****FIGURE A6****Self-Reported Experience of Anxiety,
Fear, Worries, Nervousness****FIGURE A7****Self-Reported Stress and Anxiety
Related to Symptoms of Depression**

Appendix B: Participants' Reported Helpfulness of Rio Hondo College Services

FIGURE B1
Reported Helpfulness of RioSource Room - Food Pantry

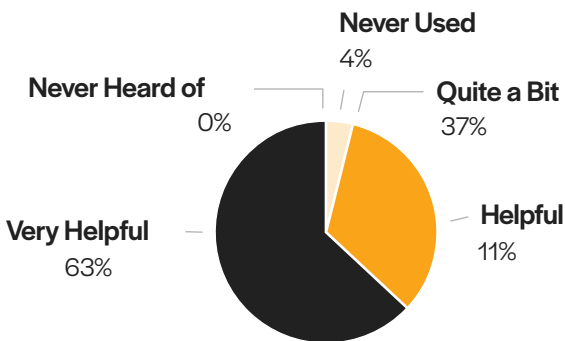


FIGURE B2
Reported Helpfulness of Rio Hondo College Child Development Center (Childcare)

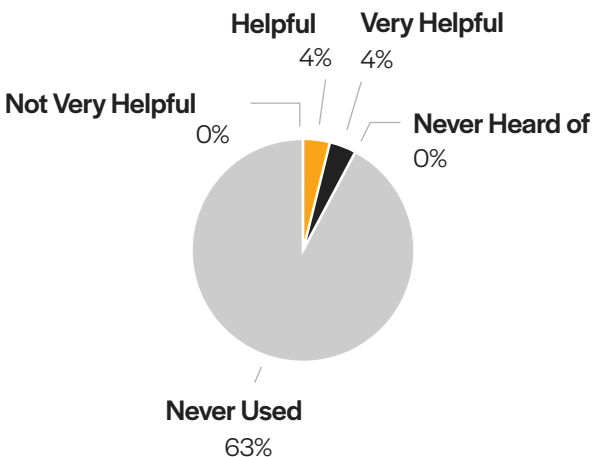


FIGURE B3
Reported Helpfulness of Counseling Center

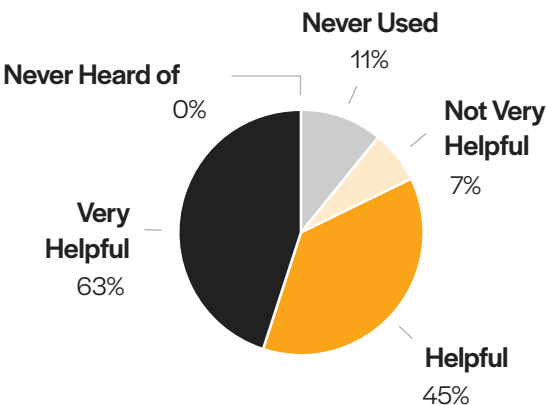


FIGURE B4
Reported Helpfulness of Extended Opportunity Programs & Services (EOP&S)

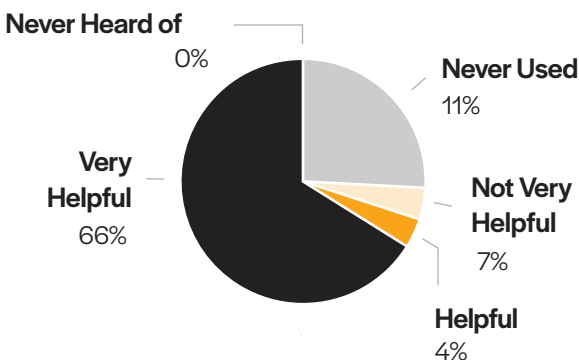


FIGURE B5

Reported Helpfulness of UndocuScholars

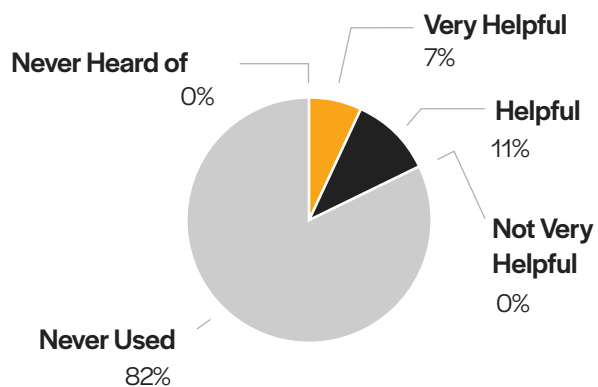
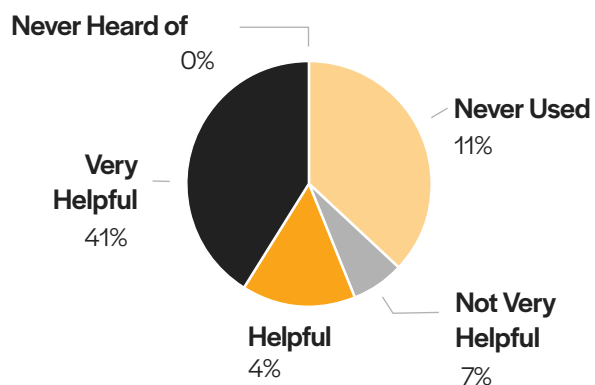


FIGURE B6

Reported Helpfulness of PRIDE Scholars



Appendix C: Semi-Structured Protocols

Semi-Structured Protocol for Qualitative Interview

Thank you for taking time to participate in this study **to gain a greater understanding of the experiences of Rio Hondo College community college students enrolled in the HOPE Scholars Program.** Your perspective is important, and we hope to learn the very best ways to serve students.

[Rashida Crutchfield or a research team member will review the informed consent.]

This interview will take approximately 60 minutes. Does this timing still work for you? As mentioned in the informed consent, with your permission, I will record the interview and will take notes as well. If you would prefer not to be audio-recorded, handwritten notes of the interview will be taken instead. As we proceed, please feel free not to answer any questions.

Questions asked in this interview will be grouped in the following themes: your experience with the HOPE Scholars program, perspectives on the process of the program (applying for, receiving and accessing), program challenges and strengths, and what people, supports, and services were most important for you in this process.

Before we begin the interview, please select a pseudonym that we will use throughout the interview. *[Ask students to use in alpha order to avoid/lower name repeats].*

Icebreaker: Please share your pseudonym, how long you've been attending Rio Hondo College and your major/area of study? And then, the fourth very important question we need you to answer is if you could master one magical skill, would you choose teleportation, invisibility, or communicating with animals?

BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

1. What is it like for you as a student at Rio Hondo College?

PROCESS

2. Please tell me about your living situation before you applied to the HOPE Scholars program.
 - a. How did you first learn about this program?
 - b. Why did you decide to apply to the program?
3. How would you describe the application process?
 - a. What kind of staff or faculty did you work with in the application process?
 - b. How was that experience? How did they support or not support you?

PROGRAM EXPERIENCE

4. Describe your experience as a student in the HOPE Scholars Program.
5. What supports and/or resources have you been offered as part of the program?
 - a. Which of these supports/resources did you access?
 - b. What about the program has been the most helpful for you?
 - c. What about the program has been least helpful? What barriers have you experienced in the program?
 - d. *What kind of staff or faculty have you worked with in the program? (Skip this question if running out of time)*

6. How has the HOPE Scholars Program helped you?
 - a. What are the strengths of the program?
7. What are the challenges of the program?
 - a. Areas for improvement?

PROGRAM IMPACT

8. How do has the HOPE Scholars Program impacted your college experience?
 - a. How did these services impact your grades, enrollment, studying, and other educational experiences?
9. How has being part of the HOPE Scholars Program impacted your housing situation, academics, or overall well-being?
 - Housing?
 - Mental or physical well-being?
 - Financial well-being?

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

10. If you were speaking to the president of Rio Hondo College, what would you want him to know?
11. Is there anything else you would like to tell me that I did not ask you?

Semi-structured Protocol for Focus Group

Thank you for taking time to participate in this study **to gain a greater understanding of the experiences of Rio Hondo College community college students enrolled in the HOPE Scholars Program.** Your perspective is important, and we hope to learn the very best ways to serve students.

[Rashida Crutchfield or a research team member will review the informed consent.]

This focus group will take approximately 90 minutes. Does this timing still work for you? As mentioned in the informed consent, with your

permission, I will record the focus group and will take notes as well. If you would prefer not to be audio-recorded, handwritten notes of the focus group will be taken instead. As we proceed, please feel free not to answer any questions.

Questions asked in this focus group will be grouped in the following themes: your experience with the HOPE Scholars program, perspectives on the process of the program (applying for, receiving, and accessing), program challenges and strengths, and what people, supports, and services were most important for you in this process.

You have chosen to participate in a focus group with 4-5 other students from your campus who have volunteered to speak about experiences with the HOPE Scholars Program. Each of you will choose a pseudonym or fake name to be used during the focus group so that your confidentiality will be maintained. Participants in the focus groups are asked not to share any information given in the focus group outside of the group.

Before we begin the focus group, please select a pseudonym that we will use throughout the focus group. *[Ask students to use in alpha order to avoid/lower name repeats]*. All group members should use these pseudonyms throughout the focus group.

Icebreaker: Please share your pseudonym, how long you've been attending Rio Hondo and your major/area of study? And then, the fourth very important question we need you to answer is if you could master one magical skill, would you choose teleportation, invisibility, or communicating with animals?

BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

12. What is it like for you as a student at Rio Hondo College?

PROCESS

13. Please tell me about your living situation before you applied to the HOPE Scholars program.
 - a. How did you first learn about this program?
 - b. Why did you decide to apply to the program?
14. How would you describe the application process?
 - a. What kind of staff or faculty did you work with in the application process?
 - b. How was that experience? How did they support or not support you?

PROGRAM EXPERIENCE

15. Describe your experience as a student in the HOPE Scholars Program.
16. What supports and/or resources have you been offered as part of the program?
 - a. Which of these supports/resources did you access?
 - b. What about the program has been the most helpful for you?
 - c. What about the program has been least helpful? What barriers have you experienced in the program?
 - d. *What kind of staff or faculty have you worked with in the program? (Skip this question if running out of time)*
17. How has the HOPE Scholars Program helped you?
 - e. What are the strengths of the program?
18. What are the challenges of the program?
 - a. Areas for improvement?

PROGRAM IMPACT

19. How has the HOPE Scholars Program impacted your college experience?
 - b. How did these services impact your grades, enrollment, studying, and other educational experiences?
20. How has being part of the HOPE Scholars Program impacted your housing situation, academics, or overall well-being?
 - Housing?
 - Mental or physical well-being?
 - Financial well-being?

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

21. If you were speaking to the president of Rio Hondo College, what would you want him to know?
22. Is there anything else you would like to tell me that I did not ask you?

Appendix D: Survey Questions

Demographic Survey

Thank you for participating in our research study: Rio Hondo College HOPE Scholars Assessment. The information from this research study will help improve the program and find better ways to support student success including retention, persistence, and graduation. As part of your participation, we ask that you complete this brief demographic survey. Your responses are confidential and will only be used for research purposes.

Please read each question carefully and select the answer(s) that best apply to you. When marking your responses:

- If the question includes checkboxes, place a clear checkmark (☐) or completely fill in the box (☐) next to your selection.
- For questions requiring written answers, write legibly in the space provided.

There are no right or wrong answers. Please answer as accurately and honestly as possible. If you prefer not to answer a particular question, you may choose to skip it. If you have any questions or need clarification, feel free to ask the researcher before beginning.

Thank you for your time and participation!

CEHE Research Team

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY CONSENT

- ☐ I give consent to participate in the demographic survey portion of this study.
- ☐ I **DO NOT** give consent to participate in the demographic survey portion of this study.

Q1 . How old are you?

- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18 - 24
- ☐ 25 – 34
- ☐ 35 – 44
- ☐ 45 – 54
- ☐ 55 – 64
- ☐ 65 – 74
- ☐ 75 – 84
- ☐ 85 or older

Q2. What is today's date? (MM/DD/YY)

Q3. What was your pseudonym or fake name for this interview or focus group?

DEMOGRAPHICS & EDUCATION

Q4. What races/ethnicities do you identify with?

Check all that apply.

- ☐ African American/Black
- ☐ Asian American (Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Pakistani, etc.)
- ☐ Latine (Guatemalan, Costa Rican, Mexican, etc.)
- ☐ Pacific Islander/Polynesian (Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Chamorro, Maori, etc.)
- ☐ Native American/Alaska Native (Navajo,

- Blackfeet Tribe, Iñupiat, Yup'ik, etc.)
- ☐ Indigenous Identity not listed (First Nations, Mayan, Andean, etc.)
- ☐ Middle Eastern (Palestinian, Afghan, Iranian, etc.)
- ☐ White (Irish, German, etc.)
- ☐ Bi/Multiracial (Please specify): _____

- ☐ Not Listed (Please specify): _____

Q5. What is your gender identity?

- ☐ Man
- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Gender Nonbinary, Genderqueer, or Gender Nonconforming
- ☐ Gender Unlisted: _____
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

Q6. Please enter all the programs you are completing at Rio Hondo College. **Check all that apply and please specify program(s).**

- ☐ Associate in Science for Transfer Degree (AS-T); Please specify program: _____
- ☐ Associate in Arts for Transfer Degree (AA-T); Please specify program: _____
- ☐ Associate of Arts Degree (AA); Please specify program: _____
- ☐ Associate of Science Degree (AS); Please specify program: _____
- ☐ Career Certificate (CC); Please specify program: _____
- ☐ Certificate of Achievement (COA); Please specify program: _____
- ☐ Certificate of Skill Proficiency (COSP); Please specify program: _____
- ☐ Noncredit Certificate (Noncredit); Please specify program: _____

Q7. Are you enrolled or planning to enroll for the Summer 2025 or Fall 2025 semesters?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No, please explain: _____
- _____
- _____
- ☐ I don't know, please explain: _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Q8. Please check any statement below that you identify with. **Check all that apply.**

- ☐ I identify as LGBTQIA+
- _____
- ☐ I identify as a former foster youth/child
- _____
- ☐ I identify as a student with a disability
- _____
- ☐ I identify as an International Student
- _____
- ☐ I identify as a non-California resident (not International)
- _____
- ☐ I identify as a first-generation college student
- _____
- ☐ I identify as a student who speaks English as a Second Language
- _____
- ☐ I identify as a Veteran of military service or Active-Duty military personnel
- _____
- ☐ I identify as a student athlete
- _____
- ☐ I identify as a DREAMER (i.e. undocumented) student
- _____
- ☐ I identify as a DACA (i.e. Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) student
- _____

☐ I am approved, awarded, or accepted for work study (with or without a work study job)

☐ I identify as a student parent

☐ I identify as a single parent with one or more full-time dependents

☐ I identify as a student who is solely responsible for paying for my living and educational expenses (please exclude support from financial aid, grants, and scholarships)

Q9. What is your marital status?

- ☐ Single, never married
☐ Living with partner
☐ Married
☐ Divorced
☐ Separated
☐ Widowed
☐ Not Listed (Please specify): _____
☐ Prefer not to answer

Q10. Do you have a spouse or partner who lives with you?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Q11a. Do you have any dependents? Note: To qualify as your dependent, you must have provided at least half of the person's total support for the year - food, shelter, clothing, etc.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Q11b. If yes, how many of your dependents receive more than 50% of their financial support from you?

☐ # of dependents: _____

Q12. While enrolled in college, do you help to financially support your parents, siblings, and/or partner?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

EMPLOYMENT

Q13. About how many hours do you generally work each week (include all your jobs)?

- ☐ 0-10 hours/week
☐ 11-20 hours/week
☐ 21-30 hours/week
☐ 31-40 hours/week
☐ 40+ hours/week

Q14. Thinking about the job at which you work the most hours: approximately how much does this job pay? Please enter a dollar amount (ex: \$18). You may indicate your pay by hour, week, month, or year.

\$_____ per hour/week/month/year (please circle one)

Q15. In the past 30 days, have you been looking for work?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Q16. When was the last time that you worked for pay?

Month: _____

Year: _____

Not applicable

Q17. When you last worked for pay approximately how much did this job pay? You can tell us your pay by hour, week, month, or year.

\$_____ per hour/week/month/year (please circle one)

FOOD, HOUSING & FINANCIAL SECURITY

These next questions are about the food you have eaten, and whether you were able to afford the food you needed.

For the following statements, please state whether they were often true, sometimes true, or never true for you in the last 30 days.

Q18. "The food that I bought just didn't last, and I didn't have money to get more." Was that often true, sometimes true or never true for you in the last 30 days?

- ☐ Often True
- ☐ Sometimes True
- ☐ Never True
- ☐ Don't Know

Q19. "I couldn't afford to eat balanced meals." Was that often true, sometimes true or never true for you in the last 30 days?

- ☐ Often True
- ☐ Sometimes True
- ☐ Never True
- ☐ Don't Know

Read the following three statements about eating situations and how they apply to your situation within the last 30 days. Please answer yes, no, or don't know.

Q20a. 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

Q20b. If yes, how many days did this happen?
Enter a number between 1 – 31.

of days: _____

Q21. In the last 30 days, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

Q22. In the last 30 days, were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

The following questions are about your current and past living situation. There are no right or wrong answers. Please choose the answer that best fits you.

Q23. In the past 12 months, was there a rent or mortgage increase that made it difficult to pay?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

Q24. In the past 12 months, did you not pay the full amount of a gas, oil, or electricity bill?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

Q25. In the last 12 months, have you slept overnight in any of the following places? **Check all that apply to you.**

- ☐ At the house or apartment of foster parent(s)

- ☐ Temporarily staying with a relative, friend or couch surfing WITH parent/guardian

- ☐ Temporarily staying with a relative, friend or couch surfing WITHOUT parent/guardian

- ☐ At a shelter WITH your parent

- ☐ At a shelter NOT with your parent

- ☐ In interim (transitional) housing or independent living program WITH a parent/guardian

- ☐ In interim (transitional) housing or independent living program NOT with a parent/guardian

- ☐ At a motel WITH a parent or guardian

- ☐ At a motel NOT with a parent or guardian

- ☐ In a camper WITH a parent or guardian

- ☐ In a camper NOT with a parent or guardian

- ☐ Temporarily at a hotel without a permanent home to return to (not on vacation or business travel)

- ☐ At a group home such as halfway house or residential program for mental health or substance abuse

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

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

- ☐ In a closed area/space with a roof not meant for human habitation such as abandoned building, car or truck, van, RV, or encampment or tent, or unconverted garage, attic, or basement due to lack of adequate accommodations.
-

- ☐ Other (Please Specify): _____
-

Q26. In the last 12 months, have you lacked a safe, regular, and adequate nighttime place to stay and sleep during the present term (i.e., semester or quarter)? This would include couch-surfing in other people's homes for temporary sleeping arrangements, single occupying facilities, homeless shelters, campgrounds, motels in vehicles, and living on the street.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

Q27. Now imagine the top of the ladder (Number 10) represents the best possible financial situation for you, and the bottom of the ladder (Number 1) represents the worst possible financial situations for you. **Place an X on the number to indicate where on the ladder you stand right now.**

SUPPORTS & SERVICES

Q28. Have you applied for (or currently using) CalFresh?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

Q29. How helpful have the following Rio Hondo College services been to your college success?

	Never Heard Of	Never Accessed	Not Very Helpful	Helpful	Very Helpful
RioSource Room - Food Pantry	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Rio Hondo College Child Development Center (childcare)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Counseling Center	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
EOP&S	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
CalWORKs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
UndocuScholars	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
PRIDE Scholars	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q30. Below is a list of circumstances that students sometimes face. Carefully read each one. For each, mark the response indicating **your level of stress or anxiety during the last 30 days prior to today.**

	Not at All	A Little Bit	Moderately	Quite a Bit	Extremely
Academics/schoolwork/grades	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Anxiety, fear, worries, nervousness	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Breakup, loss of a relationship	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Concentration	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Decisions about career/majors	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Depression	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Finances	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Irritability, anger, hostility	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Physical health problems (i.e., headaches, stomach pains)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Procrastination/getting motivated	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Reading/ study skills problems	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Relationship with romantic partner/ spouse	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sleeping problems	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Stress management	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Not at All	A Little Bit	Moderately	Quite a Bit	Extremely
Test anxiety/ speech anxiety/ performance anxiety	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Time management	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Uncertain about future/life after college	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fatigue	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Hopelessness	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Thank you for completing the Demographic Survey!

Visit our website csulb.edu/cehe
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To study and promote economic, food, and housing justice