Executive Summary:
UNLV Students Experiencing Barriers to Meeting Basic Needs

Fall 2021 survey for National League of Cities Community of Practice, Las Vegas

Prepared by J. Judd Harbin, Ph.D., Executive Director of Student Affairs Strategic Planning and Assessment, on behalf of the UNLV Student Basic Needs Committee
UNLV Students Experiencing Barriers to Meeting Basic Needs

The UNLV Student Basic Needs Committee commissioned this assessment project as part of the institution’s participation in the National League of Cities Community of Practice addressing basic needs insecurity among college students. UNLV participates in this Community of Practice (CoP) with the City of Las Vegas, United Way of Southern Nevada, and the College of Southern Nevada.

J. Judd Harbin, Ph.D., Executive Director, Student Affairs Strategic Planning and Assessment, prepared this report for the UNLV Student Basic Needs Committee co-chaired by Dr. Juanita Fain, Vice President for Student Affairs, and Sue DiBella, Interim Executive Director, Office of Community Engagement. Members of the committee contributed to the planning, administration, and reporting of this effort.

Members of the committee included representatives of offices providing services directly related to the basic needs areas (indicated in parentheses after several individuals’ names) as well as representatives from Government and Community Affairs, Academic Affairs, and Student Affairs. In addition, the committee included representatives from student governance—both undergraduate and graduate/professional. The members of the committee include:

- Juanita Fain, Co-Chair, Division of Student Affairs
- Sue DiBella, Co-Chair, Office of Community Engagement
- Rian Satterwhite, Office of Service Learning and Leadership (Housing)
- McKenzie Mayor, UNLV Cares Food Pantry (Food)
- Tad McDowell, UNLV Parking and Transit (Transportation)
- Shauna Landis, Student Wellness (Mental Health)
- Lori Temple, Office of Information Technology (Digital Access)
- Claire Tredwell, UNLV/CSUN Preschool (Childcare)
- Sabra Newby, Division of Government and Community Affairs
- Laurel Pritchard, Provost’s Office
- Phillip Burns, Office of Student Conduct
- Brianne Heinle, Graduate College
- Joanna Jezierska, Multicultural Programs
- Cecilia Maldonado, Workforce Development
- Jeffrey Orgera, Undergraduate Education & Student Success
- Shaimaa Abdelhaleem, Graduate & Professional Student Association (GPSA)
- Elena Bejinariu, Consolidated Students of UNLV (CSUN)
Executive Summary

On behalf of the Student Basic Needs Committee, the Student Affairs Strategic Planning and Assessment office distributed a survey instrument to 29,365 undergraduate, graduate, and professional students enrolled for fall 2021, and 4,530 of them (15.4%) responded. The instrument collected information about students’ experiences with barriers related to six basic needs (food, housing, transportation, digital access, mental health, and childcare) as well as access to textbooks and related course materials. More than half of the respondents (54.4%) indicated facing a barrier to at least one of those six basic needs, and 37.8% indicated that they could not afford at least one textbook or related course materials. Among the six basic needs, respondents reported barriers to mental health (26.4%) and transportation (25.9%) most frequently followed by food (19.5%) and housing (19.0%). Digital access (12.4%) and childcare (6.2%) were least common. One would expect fewer students would face barriers to childcare, as a limited number of students are parents; among 804 survey respondents indicating that they have dependents under the age of 18, 218 (27.1%) reported barriers to childcare.

These rates differed between respondents who are students of color and those who are not. More students of color (56.4% vs. 48.1%) reported facing a barrier to at least one of the six basic needs. For three of the basic needs, more students of color reported barriers. Those three basic needs were transportation (28.6% vs 19.1%), food (20.3% vs 16.3%), and digital access (13.2% vs 9.9%). Rates did not differ significantly for barriers related to housing, childcare, and mental health services. More students of color (41.5% vs 31.1%) reported that their access to required textbooks or other course materials was impacted because they could not afford them.

The survey also invited students to provide comments about how barriers to meeting basic needs hindered their progress at UNLV and to offer suggestions about how UNLV and its National League of Cities Community of Practice partners (the City of Las Vegas, College of Southern Nevada, and United Way of Southern Nevada) could support students better. The respondents submitted more than 3,500 comments to these two questions.

How barriers hindered one’s progress followed eight themes, and these themes were not mutually exclusive. That is, the content of a comment could refer to more than one theme.

1. Financial hindrances pertained to the student’s ability to afford tuition/registration, student fees, testing website registration fees, textbooks, and other necessary academic materials and supplies. These comments spoke to the affordability, price, rising costs, or the loss of income, savings, or funding. The consequences included reducing credit hours in order to be able to afford basic needs, dropping enrollment altogether, rotating which bills were (or were not) paid each month, missing classes or other academic engagements (e.g., due to vehicle breakdown, loss of childcare, speed or quality of internet connection, or need to earn income).

2. Hindrances about books and other course materials pertained to the student’s ability to purchase required textbooks by the first class for a course. The comments in this domain referred to balancing the cost of books or other course materials with other needs, paying unexpected costs for course materials, using either outdated or shared textbooks, dealing with digital barriers to accessing e-books or online materials, and finally, describing the effects of not having access to required textbooks or other course materials.

3. Falling behind pertained to their ability to register early for classes, study, prepare for class, or complete homework or other assignments, so they started courses a week or two behind, turned in assignments late, or otherwise fell behind.

4. Focusing on studies pertained to their ability to focus, concentrate, or pay attention in class, labs, or other academic activities (e.g., reading, studying).
5. **Delayed progress** pertained to enrolling in fewer hours, dropping courses, or withdrawing altogether, any of which would delay their graduations.

6. **Attendance and tardiness** pertained to attendance or participation in course or other important activities. This theme included comments about frequently or regularly arriving late, leaving early, or missing class altogether.

7. **Performance** pertained to their learning, performance on assignments, course grades, or overall GPA.

8. Finally, **relationship with professors**, pertained to challenges related to scheduling appointments with professors or meeting with them during office hours, a perception of a general lack of caring or indifference, and other difficulties attributed to faculty decisions or actions. Some comments in this theme noted supportive actions from professors.

The instrument also asked respondents for suggestions so that UNLV and Las Vegas might support students better. The suggestions followed nine themes. As with the themes related to hindrances, these nine are not mutually exclusive.

1. Financial support for students
2. Increase awareness of and resources for relevant programs or services
3. Textbook assistance
4. More understanding, less run-around
5. Teaching, instruction, and learning
6. Accessing resources
7. More online, remote, or hybrid courses/classes
8. Inclusive scheduling
9. More in-person classes

**Financial support for students** included suggestions related to increasing financial assistance, reducing charges, eliminating charges, making UNLV more affordable, increasing on-campus work opportunities or pay, offering discounts, consolidating fees, reconsidering or recalculating the cost of attendance, and subsidizing costs. Increasing financial assistance included distribution of emergency aid or emergency funds.

**Improving awareness of and resources for relevant programs and services** included suggestions related to improving awareness of existing programs and services, offering new programs and services or augmenting existing ones, and increasing funding and resources available for relevant programs and services.

**Textbook assistance** included suggestions related to increasing opportunities for textbook borrowing, renting, and exchanging. It also included more use of alternative formats of textbooks, such as e-books and downloadable PDFs. Some comments mentioned wishes for instructors to choose more mindfully between requiring textbooks and sharing reading material through an appropriate method—e.g., library reserve.

The remaining themes were less common. Students spoke to a need for more understanding and less bureaucratic or administrative “run around”; more focus on teaching, instruction, and learning; more access to resources; and more inclusive scheduling of courses and events. Finally, while 4.1% of comments (n=79) suggested more online, remote, or hybrid courses, 1.0% (n=19) sought less of that and more in-person classes.

Appendices offer frequencies for respondents who reported barriers for each of the six basic needs. The questionnaire along with flow and logic appears in the final appendix.
For more information

To request more information, the report, or any of its appendices, please contact the co-chairs of the UNLV Student Basic Needs committee. A list of appendices follow.

Appendix A reports themes arising from respondents comments to how facing barriers to basic needs hinders their progress at UNLV. Appendix B reports themes arising from respondents’ suggestions for how UNLV and Las Vegas may help students to meet their basic needs. Appendix C examines comments about how barriers related to mental health services hinder students’ progress at UNLV. Filtering for each of the five remaining basic needs, appendices D through H provide responses to the survey’s general module and optional basic need module for respondents who reported facing each barrier.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A.</td>
<td>Hindrances to Students Progress at UNLV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B.</td>
<td>Suggestions for how UNLV and Las Vegas may help students to meet their basic needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C.</td>
<td>Mental Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D.</td>
<td>Transportation Module</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E.</td>
<td>Food Module</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix F.</td>
<td>Housing Module</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix G.</td>
<td>Digital Access Module</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix H.</td>
<td>Childcare Module</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix I.</td>
<td>Additional Demographics Module for respondents reporting a barrier to at least one basic need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix J.</td>
<td>Additional Demographic Module for respondents reporting no barriers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix K.</td>
<td>Survey Instrument</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>