



Office of Institutional Research & Effectiveness (OIRE)

MC Basic Needs Survey

Summary Report

A summary of results from the first administration of this survey in the fall 2024 semester.

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Preface

Overview

The goal of the fall 2024 MC Basic Needs Survey was to learn more about the real-world challenges credit students face, including how they make ends meet and navigate through college towards graduation. It was the first administration of this survey.

OIRE adapted this survey by permission of Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab, Principal Investigator, from a study entitled “Real College: A Study of the Real Experiences of College Students.”

This survey asked questions in the following categories (or dimensions of inquiry):

- Enrollment Status, Pay Methods, Employment
- Time Management, Commuting
- Housing
- Food Insecurity
- Public Assistance
- Wellness

The dimension sections were followed by a section capturing demographic information. The survey was conducted from November 24th to December 12th of 2024.

Survey Methodology

All fall 2024 credit student were invited to participate in the survey via an MC email promotion. Three grocery-store gift cards were raffled as incentives.

Survey Participation

A total of 408 students participated, yielding results with a 95% confidence level and a +/- 5% margin of error. ***The results are moderately representative of fall 2024 semester credit students.***

Analysis Calculations and Notation

In this document, question numbers will often be expressed using the shorthand QNo notation. For instance, Q1, Q3.3, Q7 mean questions 1, 3.3, and 7.

Frequency percents are the key stats reported in this document. Unless otherwise noted, they are calculated by dividing the number of students who selected a specific answer to a survey-question by the total number of students who answered the question. The illustration below shows frequency percents and their matching frequencies (counts) for a sample question.

2. Do you like apple pie?

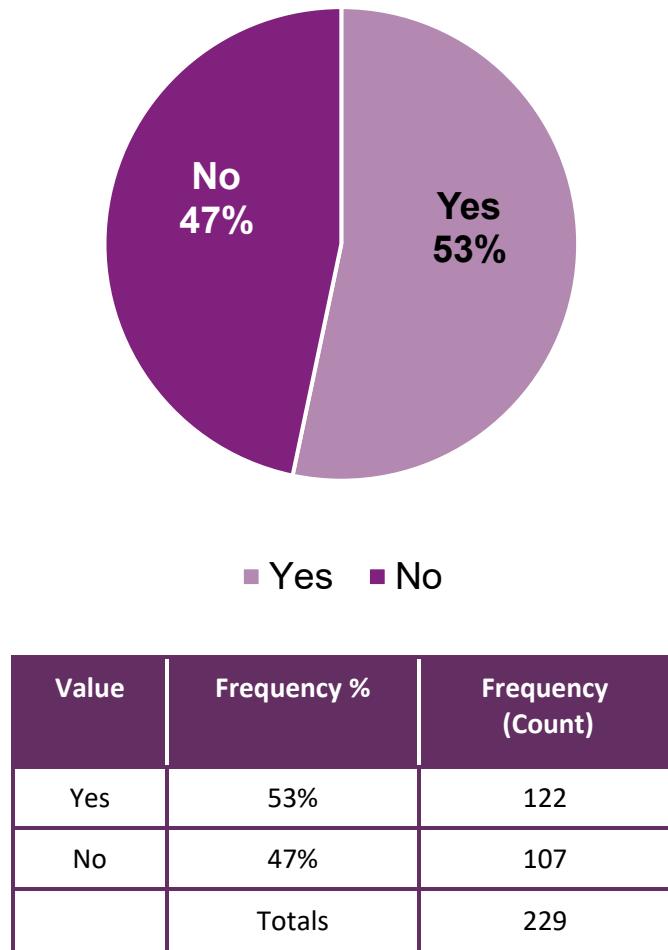


Fig. 1 Example Frequency Percent/Frequency Table

Generally, frequency percentages and their corresponding frequencies (respondent counts) are expressed in the parenthetical form in the commentary

Fr %, n=RC

where “Fr” is the numerical frequency percent rounded up to the nearest whole number, “n” is the symbol for sample size, and “RC” is the numerical sample size, that is, the respondent count on which the frequency percent is based.

For instance, “23%, n=95” means twenty-three percent of the respondents selected a specific answer to a question, which equals ninety-five students. And last, note that sample size will often be omitted when it’s obvious or when a group is so small that the number is negligible.

Analysis Strategy

This analysis focuses on the survey questions that offer the most impactful results. It does not discuss every survey question and answer set. For a full review of the results, the reader can request it from the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness using one of the methods listed at the end of the report.



Results Analysis

Enrollment Status and Employment (Questions 1 and 2)

The majority of the respondents were parttime students (59%, n=240) who'd been enrolled for less than 1 year (24%, n=143). When the range is expanded to those enrolled from up to two years, 79% of the respondents (n=323) are included.

Pay Methods (Question 3)

Most respondents (52%, n=211) pay for college expenses with grants or scholarships that include Pell Grants (40%, n=163). The next most frequently used pay methods are:

- Savings - 46%, n=188
- Family or friends - 43%, n=174
- A job that is not work-study job - 37%, n=152
- Credit cards - 34%, n=138



The last stat in the list above is particularly noteworthy. It shows that a third of the respondents (34%) pay for some portion of their college expenses using credit cards. Unfortunately, revolving credit tends to be the costliest pay method and the one with the highest potential for adverse, long-term financial consequences.

Employment (Questions 3.2 to 3.4)

Question 3.2 reveals that most of the survey respondents are not employed (59%, n=240). And of the forty-one percent (41%, n=168) who do work, those who work less than thirty hours a week (51%, n=86) slightly exceeds the ones who work thirty-plus hours (49%, n=82). According to Q3.3, seventy-six percent (76%, n=127) of the working students earn more than fifteen dollars an hour.

In response to question 3.4, which asks "In the past 30 days, have you been looking for work?", just shy of a third of the overall sample said "Yes" (30%, n=122).

Time Management and Commuting (Questions 4 to 6.1)

Consider the response to Q4,

Thinking back to the last full week that began on a Monday and ended on a Sunday, how many total hours did you spend doing each of the following activities?

- Zero
- 1-10
- 10-20
- 20-30
- 30-40
- 40-50
- Over 50

To this item, thirty-five percent (35%, n=142) of the overall sample spent from one to ten hours attending classes, labs, or discussion sessions in-person or online. Nearly the same number of respondents (33%, n=136) spent from ten to twenty hours on this.

The bulk of the overall sample devoted either from one to ten hours (31%, n=127) or ten to twenty (33%, n=133) on the remainder of their academic activities.

Commuting constituted another big time drain. Overall, over half the respondents spent one to ten hours a week traveling to and from campus (54%, n=222). Almost a fifth of respondents (19%, n=78) burned even more time commuting to the tune of ten to twenty hours a week.

And last, caregiving for dependent children or adults required from one to ten hours a week for one quarter of the overall sample (25%, n=103).

 *Keep in mind that for students who must also hold down parttime jobs (or in some cases fulltime jobs) to pay for college, the time crunch will be burdensome. This time crunch can impact both persistence and graduation rates.* An old adage bears repeating here: there are only so many hours in a day. MC thought-leaders and resource professionals should contemplate creative, proactive solutions that can help students deal with such time-management challenges.

Shifting the focus to public transportation, Q6 asserts that nearly two-thirds (63%, n=256) of the overall sample do not use public transportation (63%,).



It's interesting to note that thirteen percent (13%, n=19) of the public transportation users (n=152) in the overall sample assert that it is "Not affordable at all." Further probing reveals that this group consists mainly of black females (11%, n=10). Admittedly, these are small numbers in the grand scheme of the overall respondent sample. But it's mindful to understand that there are real students with hardships behind each stat. And extrapolating these stats to MC's total fall credit-student enrollment suggests that several thousands of students may be facing these kinds of obstacles to success.

Housing (Questions 7 – 12)

For the most part, respondents did not report having dire housing difficulties within the last twelve months. The following trio of items garnered the highest scores.

Question	Overall Sample	
	Frequency %	Count
7e. Borrowed money from friends or family to help pay bills?	42%	173
7d. Not paid the full amount of a utility bill (like gas, oil, or electricity)?	25%	101
7a. Been unable to pay or underpaid rent or mortgage?	24%	97

Table 1. Housing Concerns

Q8 revealed that a third of the overall sample admitted that an increase in rent or mortgage within the past twelve months was difficult to pay (32%, n=129).

Time Management and Commuting (Questions 4 to 6.1)

Consider the response to Q4,

Thinking back to the last full week that began on a Monday and ended on a Sunday, how many total hours did you spend doing each of the following activities?

- Zero
- 1-10
- 10-20
- 20-30
- 30-40
- 40-50
- Over 50

Food Insecurity (Question 13)

The table below combines the results of respondents who answered “often true” and “sometimes true” on the Q13 subitems. On average food insecurity was clearly a concern of nearly five in ten students in the overall sample on both Q13a and Q13c.

In the last 30 days, were the following situations often true, sometimes true, or never true for you?

Question	Overall Sample	
	Frequency %	Count
13a. I worried whether my food would run out before I got money to buy more.	48%	194
13c. I couldn't afford to eat balanced meals.	47%	191
13b. The food that I bought didn't last and I didn't have money to get more.	38%	156

Table 2. Food Insecurity

Assistance (Question 14)

The top forms of public assistance received by respondents in the overall sample are Medicaid and SNAP (food stamps).

Respondent Group	Frequency %	Count
Medicaid	27%	110
SNAP	22%	90

Table 3. Top Forms of Public Assistance



The above assistance programs affect roughly one quarter of the respondents. *But here's the rub: if the current U.S. presidential administration continues to severely reduce if not outright end these programs, then an invaluable safety net will be removed for a significant number of MC students, erecting an implacable obstacle to their academic success.*

Wellness (Question 15 - 16)

Sleeping and eating disorders top the list of wellness challenges cited by the respondents when asked in Q15,

In the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems?

Combining the stats for those who answered “over half the days” with “nearly every day” yields the following results.

Question	Frequency %	Count
15e. Poor appetite or overeating	46%	185
15d. Feeling tired or having little energy	46%	185
15c. Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or sleeping too much	45%	182

Table 4. Most Frequently Occurring Problems (Overall Sample)

But what's the ultimate impact of these and other physical and mental challenges on the respondents' course work? When asked in Q15.1,

How difficult have these problems made it for you to do your course work?

82% experienced some degree of difficulty.

Difficulty doing course work	Frequency %	Count
Somewhat difficult	51%	186
Very difficult	21%	79
Extremely difficult	10%	35

Table 5. Impact of Mental and Physical Challenges on Course Work

A similar pattern is repeated in the two companion questions,

15.2 How difficult have these problems made it for you to take care of things at home?

15.3 How difficult have these problems made it for you to get along with other people?

Taking care of things at home		Frequency %	Count
Somewhat difficult		53%	196
Very difficult		17%	63
Extremely difficult		8%	29
Totals		78%	288
Getting along with other people		Frequency %	Count
Somewhat difficult		43%	158
Very difficult		13%	46
Extremely difficult		6%	22
Totals		62%	226

Table 6. Impact of Mental and Physical Challenges on Home Life and Interpersonal Interaction

The final substantive survey items, 16a to 16f, focus on the frequency with which respondents experienced anxiety within the last two weeks. The top causes of anxiety are displayed in the following table.

Question	Frequency %	Count
16c. Worrying too much about different things	40%	163
16b. Not being able to stop or control worrying	39%	157
16a. Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge	37%	152

Table 7. Main Causes of Anxiety

Conclusion

The MC Student Wellness Center would be the logical starting point for helping students resolve these mental and physical health concerns as well as for most of the other basic needs uncovered in this survey.

The Center does a great job of regularly promoting its services and the services of affiliated external organizations. The Center may want to consider the following:

- Continue to engage in this continuous, multichannel marketing via email, flyers, signage, special-interest groups, and the Student Council.
- Personalize its marketing with some of the statistics gleaned from this survey. For instance, take one survey dimension a month as the focal point for a series of promotions.
- Work with the Communications Office to publish student testimonials that highlight how the Center has helped the students resolve their basic needs.

The above could help increase the odds students will seek the Center's help rather than drop or stop out.

Additional Data Requests

To get the full set of question results or targeted results for specific dimensions and demographic groups, you can submit a request to OIRE by one of the three methods below...

[Clicking this OIRE Request Form for follow-up data](#)

...or cutting and pasting this URL into your browser's address field:

<https://www.montgomerycollege.edu/offices/institutional-research-and-effectiveness/data-project-request.html>

...or using this QR code to fill out a project request form on your phone:



Appendix

Survey Questions

1. What's your current enrollment status?
 - Full-time (at least 12 credits)
 - Part-time (less than 12 credits)
2. How many years have you attended MC?
 - Less than 1
 - 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5 or more
3. Which of the following ways do you use to pay for expenses associated with attending college? [Yes | No]
 - 3a. Pell Grant
 - 3b. Grants or scholarships
 - 3c. Student loans
 - 3d. Stipend or fellowship
 - 3e. Work-study job
 - 3f. Job that is not a work-study job
 - 3g. Employer support
 - 3h. Family or friends
 - 3i. Savings
 - 3j. Credit cards
 - 3k. Other

3.1 In the last question, you indicated that you pay for expenses in another way. Please explain.

3.2. **In the past 30 days**, about how many hours did you generally work each week (include all your jobs)?

 - None
 - Less than 30 hours
 - 30 hours or more

3.2. In the past 30 days, about how many hours did you generally work each week (include all your jobs)?

- None
- Less than 30 hours
- 30 hours or more

3.3. Thinking about all of your jobs, on average, about how much do you earn an hour?

- \$7.25 per hour or less
- \$7.26 to \$10.00 per hour
- \$10.01 to \$12.00 per hour
- \$12.01 to \$15.00 per hour
- More than \$15 per hour

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

- Yes
- No

4. Thinking back to the last full week that began on a Monday and ended on a Sunday, how many total hours did you spend doing each of the following activities?

[Scale: 10 | 20 | 30 | 40 | 50 | 60]

- 4a. Working for pay
- 4b. Commuting to or from work or school
- 4c. Sleeping
- 4d. Taking care of a child or adult family member
- 4e. Attending college classes, labs, or discussion sections either in person or online
- 4f. Preparing for class by yourself or with others by studying, reading, writing, rehearsing, or doing other academic activities

5. How much do you pay in total per week for transportation between home and your college campus?

- \$0 to \$9 per week
- \$30 or more per week

6. Do you use public transportation to get from home to your college campus?

- Yes
- No

6.1. How affordable is public transportation?

- Not affordable at all
- Somewhat affordable
- Very affordable
- Extremely affordable

7. In the past 12 months, have you...

[Answers: Yes | No]

- 7a. been unable to pay or underpaid rent or mortgage?
- 7b. been evicted from your home?
- 7c. received a summons to appear in housing court?
- 7d. not paid the full amount of a utility bill (like gas, oil, or electricity)?
- 7e. borrowed money from friends or family to help pay bills?
- 7f. had an account default or go into collections?
- 7g. moved in with other people, even for a little while, because of financial problems?
- 7h. lived with others beyond the expected capacity of the house or apartment?

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

- Yes
- No

9. In the **past 12 months**, how many times have you moved?

- None
- Five or more times

10. In the **past 12 months**, did you leave your household because you felt unsafe?

- Yes
- No

11. In the **past 12 months**, have you ever been homeless?

- Yes
- No

12. In the **past 12 months**, have you slept in any of the following places? [Yes | No]

- 12a. In a rented or owned house, mobile home, or apartment (alone or with roommates/friends)
- 12b. In a rented or owned house, mobile home, or apartment with family
- 12c. Temporarily stayed with relative, friend or couch surfing until I find other housing
- 12d. Temporarily at a hotel or motel without a permanent home to return to (not on vacation or business travel)
- 12e. At a shelter
- 12f. In transitional housing or independent living program
- 12g. At a group home such as a halfway house or residential program for mental health or substance abuse
- 12h. At a treatment center (such as detox, hospital, etc.)
- 12i. In a camper or RV
- 12j. Outdoor location such as street, sidewalk, or alley, bus or train stop, campground or woods, park, beach, or riverbed, under bridge or overpass
- 12k. In a closed area/space with a roof not meant for human habitation such as abandoned building, car or truck, van, encampment or tent, or unconverted garage, attic, or basement

13. In the **last 30 days**, were the following situations often true, sometimes true, or never true for you? [Often true | Sometimes true | Never true]

- 13a. I worried whether my food would run out before I got money to buy more.
- 13b. The food that I bought didn't last and I didn't have money to get more.
- 13c. I couldn't afford to eat balanced meals.

13.1. 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

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

- 1 time
- 2 times
- 3 times
- 4 times
- 5 times
- More than five times

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

- 1 time
- 2 times
- 3 times
- 4 times
- 5 times
- More than 5 times

13.4. In the last 30 days, did you lose weight because there wasn't enough money for food?

- Yes
- No

13.4a. In the last 30 days, did you ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food?

- Yes
- No

13.4a1. In the last 30 days, how often did you not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food?

- 1 time
- 2 times
- 3 times
- 4 times
- 5 times
- More than five times

14. In the **past 12 months**, from which of the following programs did you receive assistance?
(Please check all that apply.)

- SNAP (food stamps)
- WIC (nutritional assistance for pregnant women and children)
- TANF (public cash assistance; formerly called ADC or ADFC)
- SSI (supplemental security income)
- SSDI (social security disability income)
- Medicaid or public health insurance
- Child care assistance)
- Unemployment compensation/insurance
- Transportation assistance
- Tax refunds (including EITC)
- Veterans benefits (Veteran's Administration benefits for a servicemen's, widow's, or survivor's pension, service disability or the GI bill)
- Utility assistance (e.g. help paying for heat or water)
- Housing assistance (e.g., housing choice voucher, subsidized site-based housing, public or non-profit- owned housing, income- based housing or rent, rental or homeowner assistance)
- Other

14.1. In the last question, you indicated that you receive other assistance. Please explain.

15. In the **last two weeks**, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems? (Remember, your responses are confidential.)

[Scale: Not at all | Several Days | Over Half the Day | Nearly Every Day]

- 15a. Little interest or pleasure in doing things
- 15b. Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless
- 15c. Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or sleeping too much
- 15d. Feeling tired or having little energy
- 15e. Poor appetite or overeating
- 15f. Feeling bad about yourself – or that you're a failure or have let yourself or your family down
- 15g. Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television
- 15h. Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed.
- 15i. Or, the opposite – being so fidgety or restless that you have been moving around a lot more than usual

15j. Thought that you would be better off dead or of hurting yourself in some way

15.1. How difficult have these problems made it for you to do your course work?

- Not Difficult at All
- Somewhat Difficult
- Very Difficult
- Extremely Difficult

15.2. How difficult have these problems made it for you to take care of things at home.

- Not Difficult at All
- Somewhat Difficult
- Very Difficult
- Extremely Difficult

15.3. How difficult have these problems made it for you to get along with other people?

- Not Difficult at All
- Somewhat Difficult
- Very Difficult
- Extremely Difficult

16. In the **last two weeks**, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems?
[Scale: Not at all | Several Days | Over Half the Day | Nearly Every Day]

- 16a. Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge
- 16b. Not being able to stop or control worrying
- 16c. Worrying too much about different things
- 16d. Trouble relaxing
- 16e. Being so restless that it's hard to sit still
- 16f. Becoming easily annoyed or irritable
- 16g. Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen

16.1. How difficult have these problems made it for you to do your course work?

- Not Difficult at All
- Somewhat Difficult
- Very Difficult
- Extremely Difficult

16.2. How difficult have these problems made it for you to take care of things at home.

- Not Difficult at All
- Somewhat Difficult
- Very Difficult
- Extremely Difficult

16.3. How difficult have these problems made it for you to get along with other people?

- Not Difficult at All
- Somewhat Difficult
- Very Difficult
- Extremely Difficult

