

Measuring Food Insecurity

The University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES) asks students to self-report their food security status. Prior to 2016, UCUES included only one question asking whether students skipped meals to save money. The 2016 survey included a two-item module to evaluate students' food security status. The 2018 survey replaced the two-item module with a six-item module developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The six-item module distinguishes between low and very low food security (combined to identify students experiencing food insecurity), while the two-item module can only be used to identify students experiencing food insecurity. This brief describes the survey questions and definitions of food insecurity based on the two different modules.

Two-Item Module in UCUES 2016

For the following statements, please say whether the statement was *often true*, *sometimes true*, or *never true* for you in the last 12 months.

1. I was worried whether my food would run out before I got more.
2. The food that I bought just didn't last, and I didn't have money to get more.

Food insecurity was defined as an affirmative response to either or both of the two food insecurity questions.

Six-Item Module in UCUES 2018

For the following statements, please say whether the statement was *often true*, *sometimes true*, or *never true* for you in the last 12 months.

1. The food that I bought just didn't last, and I didn't have money to get more.
2. I couldn't afford to eat balanced meals.

For the following statements, please select yes or no for you in the last 12 months.

3. Did you ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?
4. Did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?
5. Were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?

(If "yes" is selected to Question 3) You indicated that you had cut the size of your meals or skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food.

6. How often did this happen – *almost every month*, *some months but not every month*, or *in only 1 or 2 months*?

Food security was defined based on the sum of scores. An affirmative response of "often true" or "sometimes true" to each of Questions 1 and 2 or "yes" to each of Questions 4 to 5 each add one point to the score. If "yes" is selected for Question 3, then "almost every month" or "some months but not every month" as responses to Question 6 add two points to the score, while a response of "in only one or two months" to Question 6 adds one point to the score. Then, three levels of food security were defined.

- **FOOD SECURITY:** Raw scores of 0-1 indicate high or marginal food security, referred to generally as "food security."

- **LOW FOOD SECURITY:** Raw scores of 2-4 indicate low food security, which is characterized by reduced quality, variety or desirability of the diet.
- **VERY LOW FOOD SECURITY:** Raw scores of 5-6 indicate very low food security, which is characterized by disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.
- Low food security and very low food security are combined to represent ***Food Insecurity***.