

Supporting California's College Students Through Crisis and Beyond

"COVID-19 has been a wake up call for all government and higher education institutions- uncovering the gaps in services that folks need in order to live their daily live" - Savannah Mendoza, Sacramento State college student

The challenges COVID-19 brings to California's college campuses — from students wondering how they'll make rent, to accessing affordable mental health counseling — are not new. But as our city becomes an epicenter of the global COVID-19 pandemic, we must ensure the needs of California's college [students](#) are centered in policymaking. We call on California's institutions and federal, state, and city lawmakers to address the immediate and longer-term impact of the pandemic by enacting the following student-driven agenda:

Ensure All Students, Regardless of Income, Immigration, or Housing Status, Can Access Online Classes

"If online classes have become the UC's solution to education during COVID-19 protocol, then we need to consider the undue financial burdens that technological advancements have placed on our students. Without access to computers, internet, and campus transportation, many students have been essentially bound to their homes and disconnected from receiving an education that their tuition no longer fully covers. Students are paying for services that are no longer open or accessible during COVID-19. What will California do for computer and internet access in homes that don't have them or need one per individual? What will California do for students without housing or transportation? What will California do for students at risk for covid-19 who can't go to campuses providing these services? And what will California do for students that are especially at risk for COVID-19?" - Elena DeNecochea, UC Davis student

- As the UC, CSU, and Community College systems move to digital classrooms, we must ensure every college student that needs a laptop and Internet access with necessary technology and connection to attend class and complete assignments.
- Foster youth and College students living in California shelter systems must be able to use computers in shelters. The state of California, County Supervisors and departments, and city mayors should work with shelters to change policy and allow laptops to be used.

Ensure COVID-19's Disruption to Higher Education Does Not Impact Students' Financial Aid

- Students' class and instruction time will likely dip over the next few weeks and months, as students monitor the health and financial well-being of themselves and their families. We urge California's Congressional leaders to ensure students are not penalized if they dip below [satisfactory academic progress requirements](#).
- We also urge federal and state lawmakers to grant [flexibility with lifetime eligibility usage](#) for the Pell Grant and state grants.

Support Students' Mental Health

"Being out of school and stuck at home has left quite a toll on my mental health. As someone who is transgender and also has ADD not being in school where I have access to mental health services and counselors has left me feeling pretty lost. I am not out to my family, but I was out at school so being consistently misgendered at home and really lacking the gender affirmations I would receive from professors and peers is taking its toll." - Anonymous, Cal State LA

- The COVID-19 pandemic will impact students' mental health, and students are already feeling the impact of losing access to critical on-campus supports, such as mental health counseling. During the pandemic, California's colleges must leverage existing campus counselors to create virtual/phone counseling while campuses are closed.
- We also must ensure that students returning to campus in the fall have sufficient access to mental health counseling. Recommendation: State lawmakers should invest in students' mental wellbeing now by Passing AB-1689 College

Mental Health Services Program. This bill would appropriate 40 million annually from the administrative account of the Mental Health Services Fund to CSU, UC, and California's Community colleges.

Support Layed off or Unpaid On-campus Student Workers

“As a student who is on federal-work study, my job is factored into my financial aid. I use this money to pay for school, and getting laid off suddenly hinders my success, especially in a time of economic uncertainty for my family.” - Sloane, Sacramento State University

- We must ensure that every student has the resources needed to seek financial support under the relief package such as the emergency unemployment insurance [provision](#).

Address Food and Housing Insecurity among College Students

“As we lose access to our universities, many students like myself have made the decision to move back home to be with our families for basic needs and moral support. Students living in dorms are forced to find shelter on their own and students with off campus apartments are still tied down by leases although we no longer have a need or support to reside in our college towns.” - Ruth Sosa, Sacramento State University

- With students out of work, separated from universities, and cut off from campus resources, many have moved back to their families for support. We call on the state of California to grant students living in off-campus housing the ability to end their lease during the pandemic without penalty.
- [More than 35 percent](#) of California college students experience food insecurity — and during the pandemic, we expect more students to struggle with affording and accessing food. During the crisis, colleges and universities must ensure that on-campus food pantries remain open and are frequently advertised to students. If staffing during COVID-19 presents a challenge, consider leaving food pantries unlocked, while posting guidance for students to take only what they need.
- Campuses should be prepared for more college students needing food and housing support once the fall 2020 semester begins. California can proactively support students and our institutions by:
- Expand CalFRESH eligibility to more college students: The More CalFresh, Less Hunger Act (AB 2413, Ting/Wiener), will help battle food insecurity across California. The significant policy and practice changes promoted by the Act will increase the food and economic security of an estimated 200,000 additional CalFresh households in California when fully realized, while helping the 2.17 million households already receiving benefits stay on the program instead of dropping off for purely administrative and paperwork-related reasons as happens too often today.
- Pass AB 2388: Public postsecondary education: basic needs of students (Asm. Berman) This bill would make legislative findings about student housing insecurity and student food insecurity, and would express the intent of the Legislature to enact legislation to address the basic needs of community college students.
- Promoting and keeping AB 801 (2016) (Ca. Educ. Code §67003.5) viable while campuses are closed to college students in need: Each post-secondary educational institution must designate a staff member to serve as the Homeless and Foster Student Liaison, responsible for informing students about financial aid and other assistance available to them and assisting them to apply for and receive federal and state financial aid and available services.