

Many UC workers struggle to feed themselves and their families, study shows



An Occidental College study found that seven in 10 employees struggle to feed themselves and their families.

By Teresa Watanabe

OCTOBER 17, 2016, 5:00 AM

Seven in 10 University of California workers in clerical, administrative and support services struggle to put adequate food on the table, according to a new Occidental College study.

The study, released Monday, found that 45% of 2,890 employees surveyed throughout the 10-campus UC system went hungry at times. An additional 25% had to reduce the quality of their diet.

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Joseph Meyer, a 31-year-old administrative assistant at UC Berkeley, earns nearly \$20 an hour but said he skips breakfast and sometimes additional meals to have enough money for his asthma medications. His \$1,150 monthly rent eats up more than half of his \$2,100 monthly take-home pay.

When the money is close to running out, he said, it becomes "Top Ramen week."

Catherine Cobb made just under \$25,000 annually as a housing coordinator and medical administrative assistant at UC Irvine from 2001 to 2014. That wasn't enough to feed her and her son, so she would furtively take food from university events. A friend noticed her struggles and began buying her lunch.

"I didn't want to talk about it because I was ashamed," Cobb said. "Who wants to tell people they can't make it?"

The study by Occidental College's Urban and Environmental Policy Institute also found:

- About 9 in 10 single-parent households reported food insecurity.
- Food insecurity rates were higher among women (71.3%) than men (65.8%).
- About 8 of 10 African Americans and Latinos, and 6 of 10 whites and Asians struggled with food insecurity.
- Nearly 70% had difficulty concentrating on work at times because of hunger.
- About 80% had to choose between buying food and paying rent or utilities.

teresa.watanabe@latimes.com

Twitter: @TeresaWatanabe

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