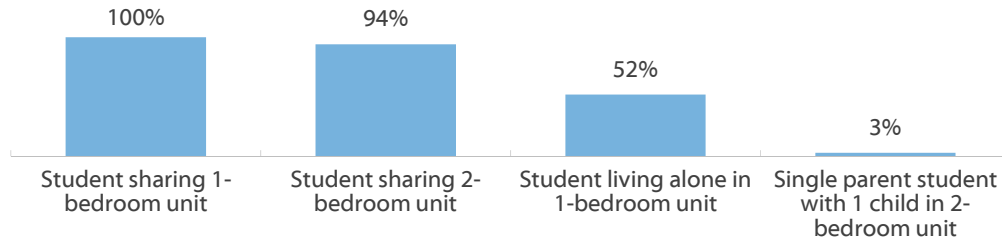


# Basic Food and Housing Costs for Some Students May Be Higher Than Estimated

**Percentage of Texas Public Universities Where the Institution’s Room and Board Estimate Covers the USDA/HUD Food and Housing Cost Estimate, by Living Situation (AY 2015–2016)**



Food and housing make up about 40 percent of the cost of attending a public university in Texas. These costs are variable, but they are not discretionary. Students have some control over their lifestyle choice, but they must eat and pay rent. As the food and housing cost estimate is the largest single component of the official cost of attendance at both community colleges and public universities, it has critical implications for the types and amounts of financial aid that students are offered and the amounts institutions expect that students/families can afford to pay.

Using their knowledge of housing located in areas popular with students, Texas universities attempt to estimate the cost of food and housing that is modest but adequate. For the 2015–2016 Award Year (AY), this average estimate is \$8,639,\* or \$960 per month. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates the minimum dietary needs of an adult can be met on \$267 per month provided that all food is prepared at home, an unlikely scenario for young adults. Subtracting \$267 from \$960 leaves \$693 for rent and utilities. The addition of one small pepperoni pizza per week, however, would raise the monthly food budget to \$302,\*\* leaving \$658 for rent and utilities.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) estimates the average nine-month cost of rent and utilities for a one-bedroom unit in the counties and Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs)\*\*\* where Texas public universities are located to be \$6,291, or \$699 per month. Sharing housing lowers the cost: a shared one-bedroom costs \$349 per person and a shared two-bedroom costs \$436.

These data suggest that a thrifty student who is a savvy grocery buyer, cooks nearly all his meals, and shares housing should manage to stay within the institutional room and board estimate of \$960 per month. However, a student who shares all these traits and lives alone will probably not be able to stay within the estimate at about half of Texas universities. At 97 percent of Texas universities, the room and board estimate is too low for a single parent with a dependent. About 28 percent of U.S. undergraduates in AY 2011–2012 had dependent children, and about 15 percent were single parents.

**Average USDA/HUD Food and Housing Costs for Two Semesters (9 Months) for Counties and MSAs\*\*\* Where Texas Public Universities Are Located (AY 2015–2016)**

	Student sharing 1-bedroom unit	Student sharing 2-bedroom unit	Student living alone in 1-bedroom unit	Single parent student with 1 child in 2-bedroom unit
Food	\$2,403	\$2,403	\$2,403	\$3,606
Housing	\$3,145	\$3,922	\$6,291	\$7,844
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$5,548</b>	<b>\$6,325</b>	<b>\$8,694</b>	<b>\$11,450</b>

\*\$8,980 when weighted for enrollment; see glossary for clarification. \*\* Based on the cost at Conan’s Pizza near the University of Texas at Austin, November 2016. \*\*\* A Metropolitan Statistical Area is a geographic area of 50,000 or more inhabitants.

Sources: All Costs and Enrollments for 2015–2016: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) 2015 (<http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/>); U.S. Department of Agriculture. "Official USDA Food Plans: Cost of Food at Home at Four Levels, U.S. Average, June 2016." (<http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/USDAFoodCost-Home.htm>); U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). "Fair Market Rents 2016 for Existing Housing, October 2016." (<http://www.huduser.org/datasets/fmr.html>); All other: U.S. Department of Education, National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS) 2012 (<http://www.nces.ed.gov/das>).

