



TRELLIS<sup>®</sup>  
C O M P A N Y

# Studying on Empty

Trellis Research Webinar

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@TrellisResearch

# About Trellis Company

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- Trellis Company ([www.trelliscompany.org](http://www.trelliscompany.org)) is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation with the dual mission of helping student borrowers successfully repay their education loans and promoting access and success in higher education.
- For nearly 40 years, Trellis Company has provided individualized services to student loan borrowers and support to institutions and communities.



# About Trellis Research

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- Trellis Research provides colleges and policymakers insight into student success through the lens of college affordability.
- We invite you to visit our library of publications at [www.trelliscompany.org/research](http://www.trelliscompany.org/research).
- Please follow us on Twitter @TrellisResearch for notifications of new research publications and discussions of a variety of higher education topics.





# Introduction to Food Insecurity

# About Food Insecurity

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FOOD SECURE

**HIGH**

“**No** reported indications of food access problems or limitations.”

**MARGINAL**

“**One or two** reported indications – typically of anxiety over food sufficiency or shortage of food in the house. Little or no indications of changes in diets or intake.”

FOOD INSECURE

**LOW**

“**Reports** of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet. **Little or no indication** of reduced food intake.”

**VERY LOW**

“**Reports of multiple** indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.”



# Food Security Rubric: High/Marginal

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## HIGH/MARGINAL FOOD SECURITY

### 0-1 AFFIRMATIVES

*"[I applied for food stamps], I guess, I got tired of being hungry. I get to eat breakfast before I go to work, before I go to school, and I usually take me a sandwich or something to eat during the day, and it helps me concentrate more. I'm not sitting in class thinking, 'Oh my God, I'm hungry.'"*

33+ year-old, full-time public student



# Food Security Rubric: Low

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## LOW FOOD SECURITY

2-4 AFFIRMATIVES

*"[I couldn't afford to eat balanced meals]. That was true pretty often. Probably 70% of the time. I couldn't afford vegetables... 'Cause pasta's way cheaper than vegetables. You can get a box of pasta for a dollar."*

18- to 22-year-old, full-time private student



# Food Security Rubric: Very Low

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## VERY LOW FOOD SECURITY

5-6 AFFIRMATIVES

*"Sometimes I don't have enough money. Sometimes it's enough money for gas, and I need the gas to get to work. There's times that if I have an apple, I'll eat an apple, or I'll go sometimes not eating that day."*

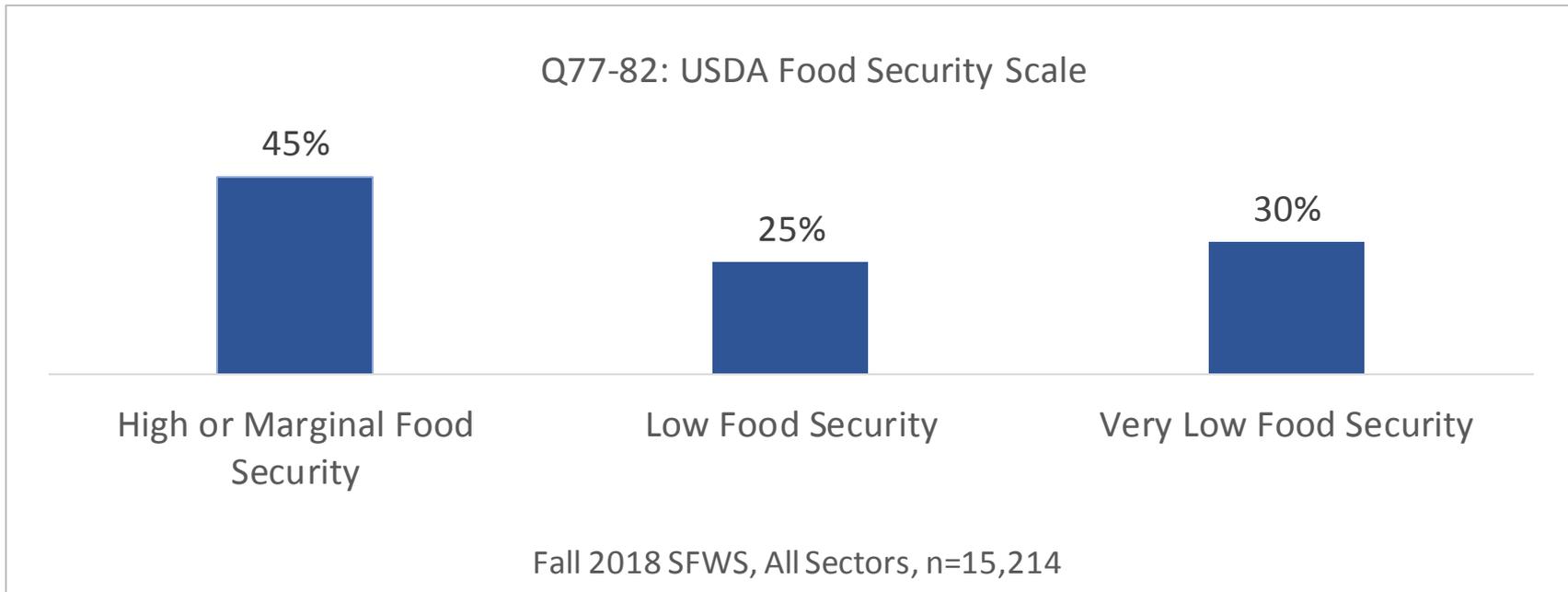
33+ year-old, full-time public student





# Student Voices: Learning from Studying on Empty

# Prevalence of Food Insecurity



From the Trellis' Fall 2018 Student Financial Wellness Survey:

- **More than half** of respondents showed signs of either low food security (**25 percent**) or very low food security (**30 percent**) within 30 days prior to the survey.



# About the Financial Security Study

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Trellis Research conducted qualitative interviews from January to October, 2017



Interviewed participants monthly for **nine** months, capturing the understudied summer experience



Started with **72** students from private four-year, public four-year, and community colleges



Conducted **499** interviews which produced **291** hours of recordings



# Food Security Over Time

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FEW STUDENTS SAW THEIR LEVEL OF FOOD SECURITY **STAY THE SAME** OVER THE NINE MONTHS.



FOR MOST, THEIR LEVEL OF FOOD SECURITY **SHIFTED OVER TIME**.



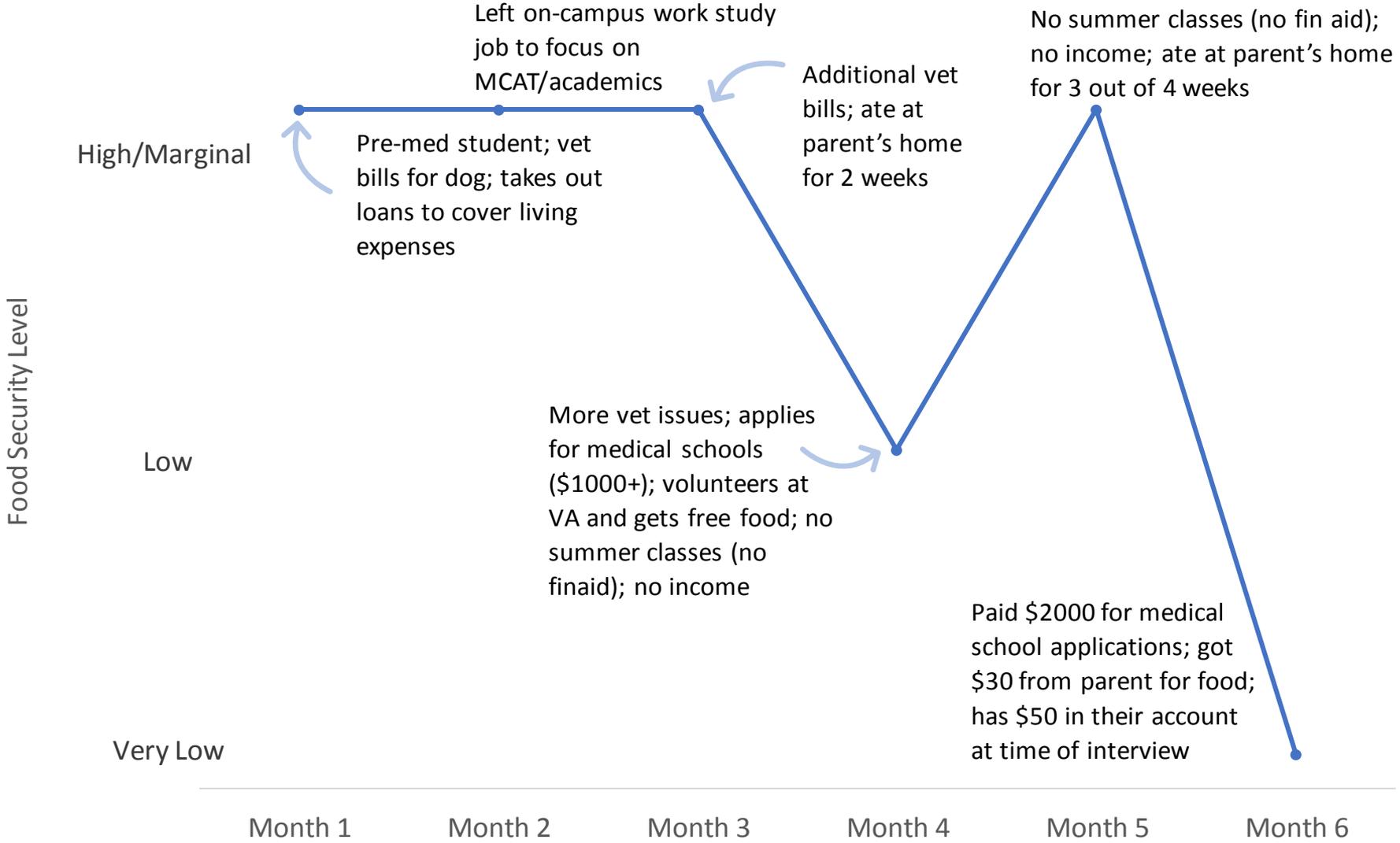
FOR SOME STUDENTS, **ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE MIRRORED THEIR LEVEL OF FOOD SECURITY**.



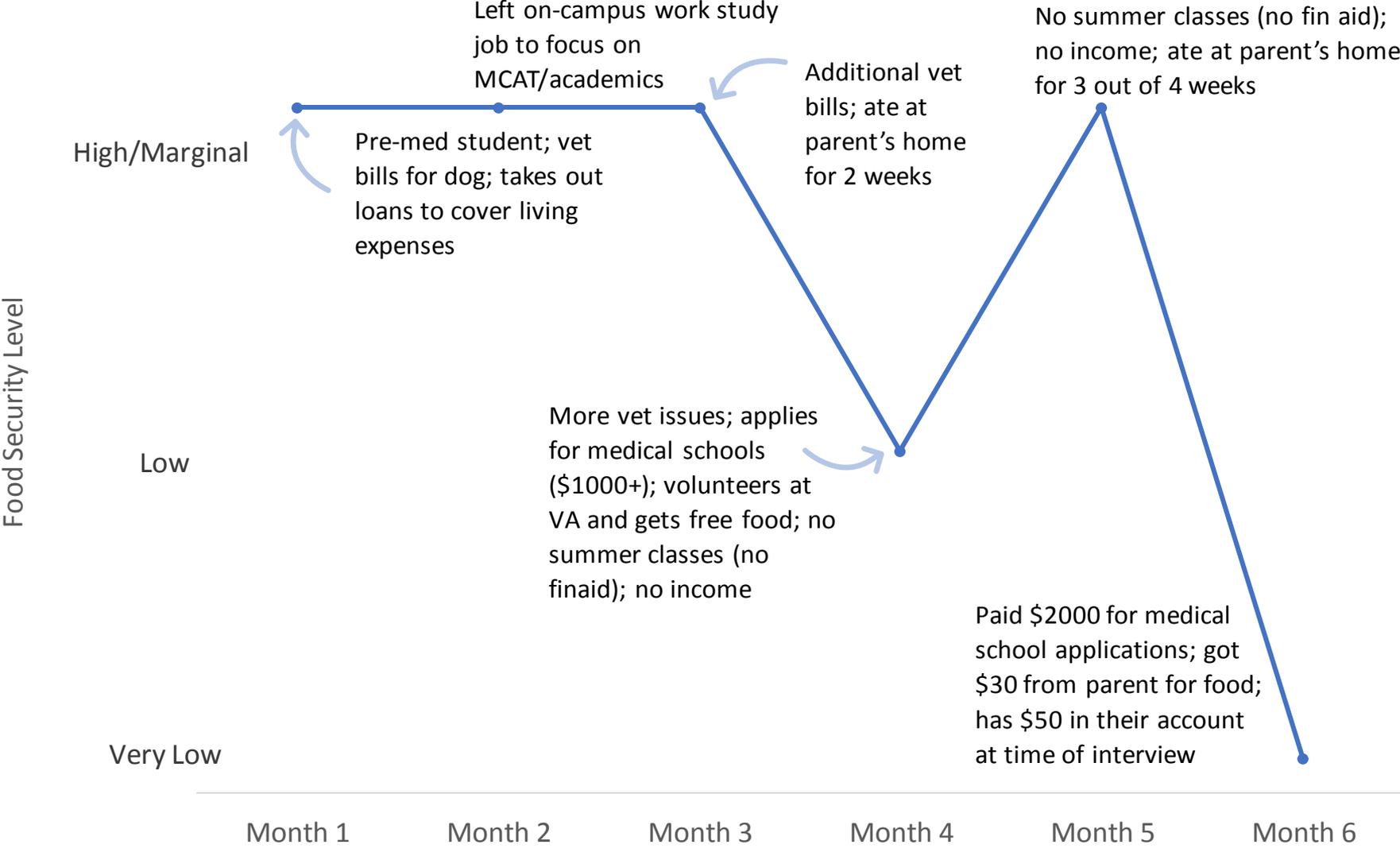


*“I mean... I have enough money to make dinner. For lunch, I usually eat chips or a cheap snack like that. **This month has been a lot harder than other months... the school applications, the deposits, the dog... a lot of expenses I don't normally have.**”*

# Student Voices: Learning from Studying on Empty



# Student Voices: Learning from Studying on Empty





*“I was a in a scholarship house [before]. I lived with 17 other guys... it was a big house. \$500 [was] spent every single week on groceries, so we always had food in the house [and] meals cooked for us at night. I never had to worry about food like I do now. Now, I worry about every single meal.”*

# Student Voices: Learning from Studying on Empty



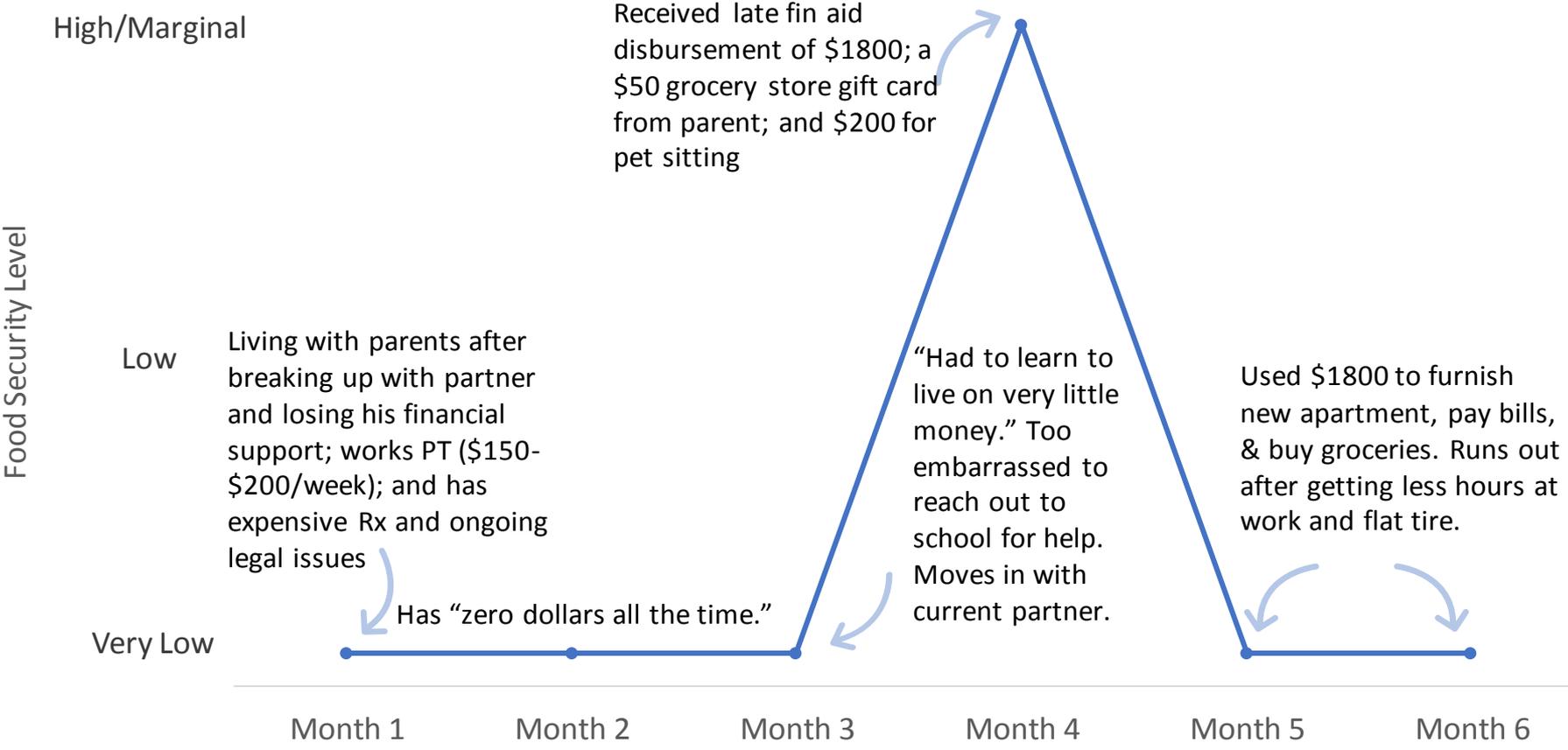
# Student Voices: Learning from Studying on Empty



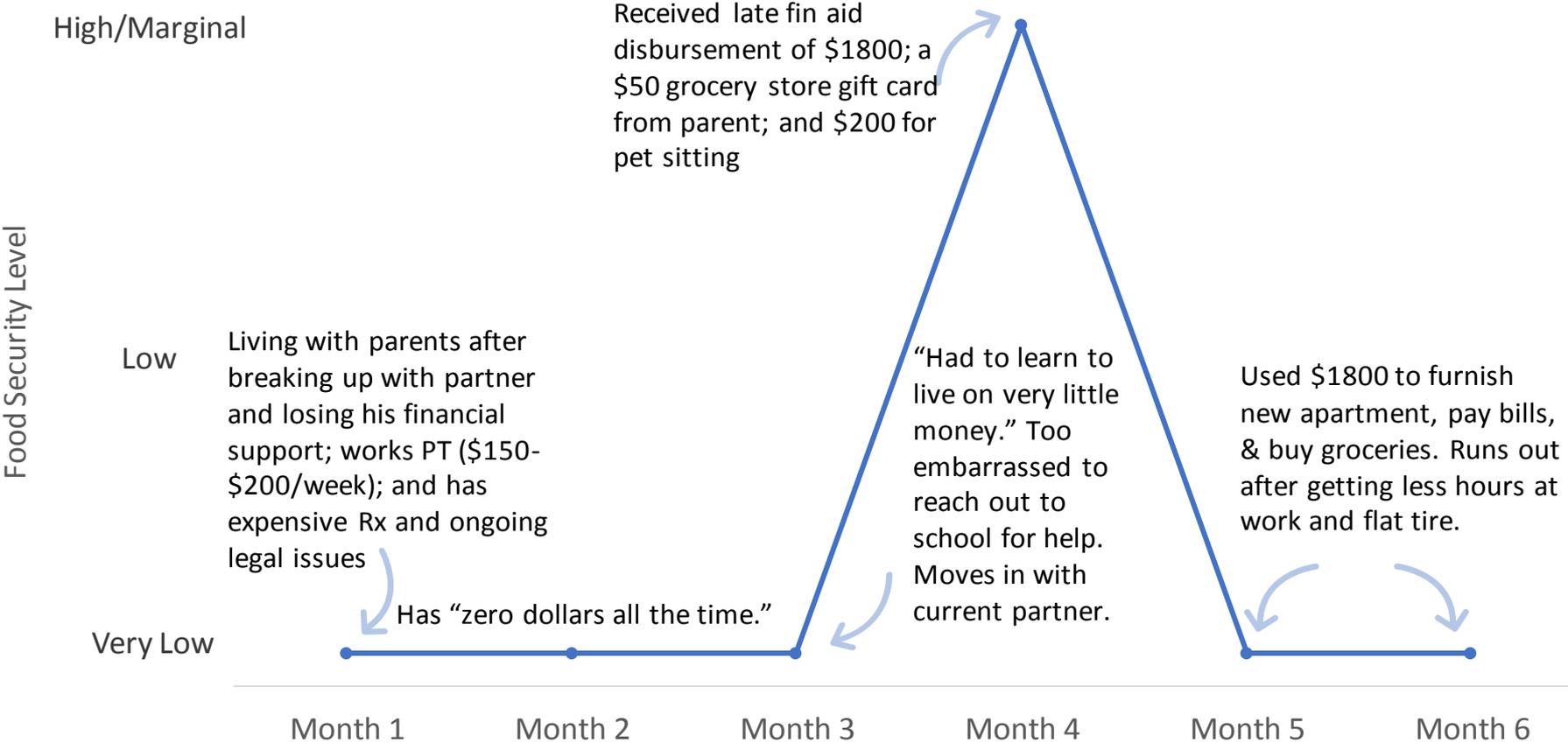


*“I had extra [financial aid] money out of nowhere and it was pretty awesome. I wasn't totally poor. But that went away extremely quickly. To me, \$1,800 is like \$10,000. So, it was real exciting, but it [went] so fast. We got stuff for our apartment. We paid bills. We went crazy with the groceries.”*

# Student Voices: Learning from Studying on Empty



# Student Voices: Learning from Studying on Empty



DRIVERS	IMPROVING
<b>EMPLOYMENT</b>	Stable pay; receives a living wage; easy commute; work schedule accommodates school
<b>FINANCIAL RESOURCES</b>	Gains access to federal, institutional, or supplemental aid (e.g., Pell grant or SNAP); financial aid disbursement (beginning of semester)
<b>SOCIAL NETWORKS</b>	Parent(s) send money; student returns home to live with parent(s); moves in with sibling; parent(s) visits and buy groceries; friend(s) give meal "swipes" or pick up the check; romantic partner helps pay for and prepare meals
<b>EXPENSES</b>	Finds time to grocery shop and plan affordable meals; family member provides childcare; moves to less expensive apartment; receives transportation voucher from school; has classes with open resource textbooks

## DECLINING

## DRIVERS

Erratic work hours; loss of job; receives low pay; long commute; underemployed

### EMPLOYMENT

Loss of financial aid; insufficient aid package; loses academic or merit-based scholarship; classified as dependent student when actually independent

### FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Parent loses job or becomes ill; is a single parent or has dependents; abrupt changes in childcare (i.e., lost access or increased cost); sibling or parent(s) requires financial support; separation/divorce from romantic partner

### SOCIAL NETWORKS

Car needs repair; unexpected medical bills; price of daycare rises; cost of textbooks; lab fees; roommate moves out or doesn't pay share of rent; rent increases; utility bill spikes

### EXPENSES

# Impacts of Food Insecurity

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Increased stress and feelings of guilt or shame



Decreased academic performance and expectations



Negative health outcomes (e.g., low iron, weight gain/loss, lack of energy, etc.)



Disruption of family and/or social life





*“Food has played a big part of [my] stress. I didn’t realize how stressful food could be with school. That’s something that people don’t understand when they go off to college...that you’re basically on your own and it’s harder to keep it balanced and sufficient than you’d expect. You can have food, but is it a real meal?”*

# Coping with Food Insecurity

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- INFERIOR FOOD SUBSTITUTIONS

- HOUSING ARRANGEMENTS

- EXTERNAL RESOURCES (WIC, SNAP, TANF)

- ACADEMIC SHORTCUTS

- MONEY MANAGEMENT



# Coping with Food Insecurity

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- ACADEMIC SHORTCUTS
- MONEY MANAGEMENT





*“I was working on \$7 in my bank account for a good five days... I was so worried some hidden thing would suddenly come out and it would bounce. I was not a happy camper. But I knew I could last the week with what we had. I lived off my tip money for meals at work. If I didn’t get enough [tips] that day, I just wouldn’t eat.”*



# Promising Practices & Interventions for Combatting Food Insecurity on Campus

# Expand Campus Resources

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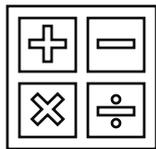
Offer emergency aid programs



Connect students to public benefits



Provide healthy & low-price food options at campus dining areas



Rework financial aid calculations and delivery



Build Student Resource Centers (food pantries, counseling, clothes closets, transportation vouchers)



Schools revisit estimates for the full costs of college, especially for those students with dependents



# Financial Education and Planning

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Help students to create a financial plan



Provide financial education trainings and workshops



Ensure students understand full costs of college, especially supplemental costs (e.g., textbooks, labs, course-specific fees)



Offer financial coaching and peer-to-peer coaching



# Community Partnerships and Advocacy

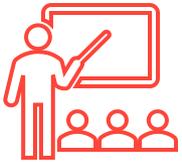
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- PARTNER WITH LOCAL HOUSING AUTHORITIES AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS
- STATE AND FEDERAL POLICY ADVOCACY
- FUNDRAISING



# School Solutions: Campus Culture

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Train staff and faculty to identify signs of basic needs insecurity and financial struggles



Use unmet need as a risk-factor



Rethink college enrollment options; offer minimester courses



Evaluate how schools message affordability



Provide open education resources



# Conclusion

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- Students put a lot of effort into balancing finances, time, and energy. Academic success is a product of how well they are able to do this and how big the challenges are.
- Food security among college students is typically fluid. Better control of the drivers of food security, and students will be more successful.
- Schools can galvanize support within their communities and among their representatives to address food security.



# Questions?

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Please follow us on Twitter: **@TrellisResearch**



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