

Basic needs services at The University of Alabama at Birmingham

The University of Alabama at Birmingham has a benefits hub with a food pantry (Blazer Kitchen at Hill Student Center); emergency financial aid; a program that provides grants for students to purchase textbooks; a laptop/technology loaner program; a meal voucher program for on-campus dining; and partnerships with community agencies for housing insecurity, food insecurity, and financial insecurity.

Birmingham, Alabama
Locale: Mid-size city
Fall 2020 enrollment: 13,878
Students of color: 45%
Full-time students receiving Pell: 36%

- **Student assistance and support website** <https://www.uab.edu/students/assistance/>
- **Blazer Kitchen website** <https://www.uab.edu/students/assistance/blazer-kitchen>
- **Blazer Kitchen Instagram page** <https://www.instagram.com/blazerkitchen/?hl=en>

These services began with the food pantry and additional services were developed to respond to student needs as they emerged; many emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. They also partner with the TRIO office and First Generation office to ensure students from systematically excluded or marginalized backgrounds are aware of services.

Staff members shared that basic needs services are necessary to support students’ academic success on a daily basis and to support retention and graduation. They also discussed the importance of seeing students as human beings and providing them with the skills to be self-advocates. They described a shift in thinking across the college in recent years to think about students holistically and not just in terms of their academic performance or presence in the classroom. Ultimately, the goal is for student to be successful out in the world.

“We want our students to be successful and make it to graduation, but what we’re really doing is setting them up for success once they leave our campus. If we can teach them how to get connected and find resources that they need, they can do that, whether it’s in Birmingham, Alabama, Chicago, Illinois, or Wichita, Kansas, it doesn’t matter. If we can teach them how to advocate for themselves and how to go about finding the things they need, then they’re going to be OK once they leave us. We would be doing a huge disservice if we were only teaching them how to navigate our campus.”

– Staff person at University of Alabama at Birmingham