

Student Food Insecurity – A Rite of Passage?

Figure 1: Many students have experienced some variant of a quick, cheap, easy meal with virtually zero nutritional power, like the ramen with chili-water pictured on the right. Often meals like these are consumed in times when there's simply no other food around and no money to spare. These 'struggle-meals' are often reminisced about, but are far from enjoyable in the moment. If it's not the quality of food students are too worried about, it is when and what their next meal will be and how it comes at a cost of other expenses.



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Food insecurity is a leading health concern in Canada ([Statistics Canada, 2022](#)), where emerging research indicates that university students are particularly vulnerable ([Botorff et al., 2020](#)) especially post COVID-19 ([National Student Food Insecurity Report, 2021](#)). At higher education institutions, much of the response to curbing this issue has fallen onto students and non-profit community organizations that have established food banks. Some questions to consider are the sustainability of these resources, especially since some have dissolved over the years, and the extent to which the university administration should help in improving affordable, appetizing, healthy food.

One approach could include careful consideration of the diversity of student body. For instance, international students may experience food insecurity more than domestic students given the higher tuition costs, costs of living and lack of family support ([Blundell et al., 2019](#)). Commuters often have little choice in affordable, healthy food when coming to campus for the day, usually resorting to fast food. For students living in dorms, food may only be served during set meal times, often clashing with class times and forcing students to skip meals. In terms of menus, although effort has been put to include culturally appropriate food options, consultation with communities and students from these cultures could result in more authentic, better tasting and improved-quality meals. Finding a balance point between affordable and desirable food for students can be achieved through developing cross-campus initiatives that: (1) collect student perspectives and feedback on food concerns, (2) supplement existing food banks and food security movements and (3) finding out the reasons for food banks and food support on campus in the first place. Additionally, initiatives can be started to increase spaces for students to eat together and to receive food during stressful periods of the academic year, such as exam season where health and nutrition may be put to the side. Lastly, students could receive workshops or accessible information on how to prepare and source food, how to budget for groceries and tips for mindful eating habits. By connecting the experiences students face on and off campus, we can collaborate and integrate leveraging of resources and supports.



SDG2 – Zero Hunger: Canada prioritizes achieving food security, improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture

SDG3 – Good Health and Well-Being: the food decisions and habits young adults make can shape their health in the future, especially in the context of developing chronic health issues

SDG4 – Quality Education: with food being less of a concern, students can focus on their education and perform better in class