



AN INTERNATIONAL LENS ON FOOD:

Evaluating how international students at the University of Alberta define healthy eating and the barriers they face to accessing nutritious and culturally appropriate foods.

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Photos from a recent cooking class at the University of Alberta. Classes were created and delivered by both international and domestic students and open to any student on campus.

Familiar, healthy food is an anchor to students as they adjust to a new home. International students, defined in this study as students who left their country of origin to study in Canada and have resided for more than one semester in Canada. International students often face problems adjusting to the food landscape, or the cycle of food production and consumption, of their host country^{1 2}.

This project explored how international students' cultural upbringing combined with knowledge of Canadian food landscapes impacts what they eat. By understanding influences on international students' eating and cooking habits, the University of Alberta is positioned to create better programming to support students in eating nutritious food that is reflective of their ethnic diets.

We aimed to define what healthy eating is to different populations of international students and the challenges they face to eating culturally relevant and nutritious meals. Thirty-one student interviews as well as one focus group of 14 students informed this study's findings.

Our results showed that international students had a strong preference to maintain as much of their ethnic dietary habits as possible while they live in Canada. Students suggested that maintaining a similar diet as they had in their home countries allowed them to feel less homesick and helped them adjust to other changes as a result of moving to Canada. In addition, some students cited cultural beliefs, biological, and religious reasons for trying to maintain their ethnic dietary patterns.

¹ Grayson, J. P. (2008). The experiences and outcomes of domestic and international students at four Canadian universities. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 27(3), 215-230.

² Poyrazli, S., & Grahame, K. M. (2007). Barriers to adjustment: Needs of international students within a semi-urban campus community. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 34(1), 28-46.



Students understood that Canada, specifically Alberta, offers different ingredients than they are accustomed to cooking with. Many students expressed struggling to integrate their ethnic diets with Alberta's food landscape due to a lack of knowledge around ingredients and cooking skills. More broadly, international students faced barriers that fell into the following categories: meal planning, purchasing groceries, cooking meals, and purchasing foods from vendors.

International students provided three overarching recommendations that campus resources could partake in to ensure students have a smoother transition to accessing nutritious meals while living in Canada:

1. Create food and cooking education programming that is applicable and appealing to international students.
2. Better promotion of current services and resources on campus, as well as local ethnic businesses.
3. Create programming that bolsters social support for students struggling to access culturally relevant and nutritious meals.

This report details specific challenges students are faced with as related to the categories mentioned above, and elaborates on recommendations, provided by students, to overcome these challenges. To find out more information on how these recommendations are being implemented please visit <http://www.conversecook.com>.

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“Diet is not a one-size-fits-all.”

-Student from Brazil

INTRODUCTION

Newcomer Canadians face unique barriers to accessing nutritious meals such as lack of knowledge about Canadian food, understanding the concept of seasonal foods, cultural beliefs and practices, and accessibility to culturally relevant foods^{3 4}.

Recognizing that these barriers are not well documented among international student populations, this study focused on assessing common barriers international students at the University of Alberta faced to accessing nutritious foods. In addition, this report provides specific suggestions to improve access to culturally nutritious food.

WHO PARTICIPATED

This study was conducted between January to April 2016 and open to any international student, defined in this study as a student born outside of Canada who moved to Edmonton, Alberta to pursue post-secondary studies and who had been studying at the University of Alberta for more than one semester. In total 45 students participated in this study, with 14 students participating via a focus group and 31 students being individually interviewed.

Individual interviews consisted of asking students 23 questions pertaining to their definitions of healthy and unhealthy eating, barriers that the students faced to accessing culturally relevant and nutritious food, their perspective on current campus services that foster healthy eating, and what services they would like to see on campus to better support their needs. The focus group questions asked students to evaluate services, provide insight on current accessibility to culturally relevant and nutritious foods, and provide recommendations.

Fig. 1: Twenty-four countries are represented in this study including: Malaysia, Brazil, China, United Arab Emirates, Ghana, Nigeria, Bangladesh, England, South Korea, Pakistan, Japan, Mexico, Iran, Ivory Coast, Kuwait, Indonesia, Romania, Australia, Libya, Ukraine, Brunei Darussalam, India, Columbia and Kenya.



³ Varghese, S., & Moore-Orr, R. (2002). Dietary acculturation and health-related issues of Indian immigrant families in Newfoundland. *Canadian Journal of Dietetic Practice and Research*, 63(2), 72-79.

⁴ Sanou, D., O'Reilly, E., Ngnie-Teta, I., Batal, M., Mondain, N., Andrew, C., ... & Bourgeault, I. L. (2014). Acculturation and nutritional health of immigrants in Canada: a scoping review. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*, 16(1), 24-34.

“Food should be simple as possible.”

-Student from Brunei Darussalam



Regardless of cultural background, most international students defined healthy eating as a balance of components on a plate, where vegetables were usually the biggest component on the plate and meat was the smallest. Unhealthy meals were defined as unbalanced, oily/greasy, processed or artificial, and consisting of junk food. This is similar to the Government of Canada’s definition of healthy eating for Canadians ⁵.

One difference in the definition of healthy eating found is that many participants mentioned warm meals and cooked meals as important to a healthy diet.

⁵ Health Canada. (2019, January 21). *Canada's Food Guide?* Retrieved January 21, 2019, from <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>.



IMPORTANCE OF CULTURAL UPBRINGING ON DIET

For this study we were interested in determining how much influence cultural upbringing has on students' diets and why students might choose to continue their ethnic dietary practices in Canada. To assess this we asked students two questions: Firstly, "Does eating foods from your upbringing and home country play an important role in your diet?", and secondly, "Is it important for international students to eat consistent with their previous ethnic practices here in Canada?" To both questions, the majority of participants answered "yes" with the understanding that their diets may change slightly due to Canada's food landscape ⁶.

Because participants acknowledged that their cultural upbringing plays an important role in their personal diets, we asked for further elaboration to understand why.

TOP FOUR REASONS STUDENTS CONTINUE THEIR CULTURAL FOOD PRACTICES AND DIETS HERE IN CANADA

1) CULTURAL BELIEFS ABOUT FOOD

Many students described beliefs about how food should look and taste. When students encounter food that appears different here in Canada it can be off-putting for them to purchase and consume, even if there is nothing wrong with the food item.

"Seedless watermelon is something I don't have at home, so when I saw them in Edmonton I thought the watermelon was artificial and sketchy so I didn't buy it."

-Student from Nigeria

"Back home I was told that too much milk causes breast cancer because of growth hormones [in the milk]. I learnt [here that] it's false, but this still influences my decision to have milk."

-Student from Henan China

Review of Cho Cho San, Potts Point©
insatiablomunch

⁶ Out of the 31 students who were individually interviewed 24 responded yes to the first question, two responded sometimes and five responded no. When it came to the second question 22 responded with "yes", and four responded with "yes to a certain extent", and five answered "no."

2) TO COPE WITH HOMESICKNESS AND KEEP CULTURE ALIVE (CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY)

“Food from my homeland makes me feel less homesick and makes students feel like they still belong to their culture.”

-Student from Mexico

“[We eat our culturally common food]⁷ to keep our traditions and share them with people here.”

-Student from Columbia

3) IT TAKES TIME TO CHANGE FOOD HABITS AND ADAPT TO CANADIAN FOODS

“Coming to Canada is a big cultural shock. [For the] first two years I couldn’t eat pizza because I wasn’t used to it.”

-Student from Shandong China

“This first year of being away is stressful enough (getting familiar with a new country, culture, people, classes, etc.), so keeping at least a somewhat familiar diet is very important.”

-Student from Ukraine

4) BIOLOGICAL CHANGES (I.E., STUDENTS MAY EXPERIENCE NEGATIVE PHYSICAL CONSEQUENCES FROM CHANGING THEIR DIET TOO DRASTICALLY)

Some of my friends lost their sensitivity to taste. For example, they can’t eat spicy food [so] when [they] go back home after eating Canadian food, [they cannot share in the same food] making them feel isolated from their friends (and family that reside in their home country).”

-Student from Indonesia

“Eating lots of Canadian food means you gain more weight. Our intestine is not adapted to Canadian food, for example our gut microbes are different.”

-Student from Liaoning, China

⁷ Words in brackets added to make sentences more grammatically correct. Words in parenthesis added to clarify meaning of students’ words.

OVERVIEW OF BARRIERS

Clearly, maintaining ethnic diets are important to international students, which can be a challenge given Alberta's unique 'food landscape' (elaborated in the rest of this report). The next section outlines the barriers students identified to accessing culturally relevant and nutritious foods and provides recommendations from students to alleviate those barriers. The barriers have been sorted into four stages: meal planning, purchasing groceries, cooking meals, and purchasing foods from vendors. Each stage includes sub-barriers and recommendations.

Please note that students identified these barriers as more salient obstacles to eating healthy in their first few months on campus. Many students overcame these barriers with great difficulty, but it is our hope that with this information we can create supports to better ease the transition for students when they first arrive to campus.

These two images demonstrate how produce sections throughout the world are set up in different ways.



Produce Section © Michael Kappel



Produce Vendor © Shawn Harquail

1. BARRIERS TO MEAL PLANNING

These barriers include tasks such as choosing a recipe, creating a grocery list, or transporting oneself to the grocery store to shop for ingredients. Many students disclosed that they did not know where to start when it came to meal planning. This lack of planning impacted what foods they purchased in the grocery store (i.e., prepackaged meals versus ingredients to make a meal) and whether they cooked a meal or ate out.

“I never made anything myself in 1st year because of lack of knowledge and stress.”

-Student from Bangladesh

“[I’d make] pasta if I knew how to cook it.”

-Student from Guangdong, China

A) LOCATIONS OF GROCERY STORES

In Canada, despite our variety of stores, many of our study participants felt lonesome for the “one stop shop” experience they had in their home country for all their prepping and cooking needs. For example, students of East Asian heritage would typically only be able to find their marinade sauces in T&T, an Asian supermarket found throughout Canada. Many students did not realize for some time (up to a year, for example) that they would have to go to a specific grocery store to purchase certain ethnic foods, and this impacted their ability to meal plan. Locations of ethnic grocery stores was of particular importance to students whose diets were influenced by religious practices.

“I often had to eat non-halal meat based food because I did not know where I could find halal products.”

-Student from Bangladesh

“We mainly were looking for Halal meats; finding that was an issue for us in the first year.”

-Student from Iran

“A huge problem is that grocery stores are very spread out and you need to know bus routes and what stores have what. It’s a steep learning curve but over time I learnt how to shop to get the right groceries.”

-Student from Shandong, China.

B) TRANSPORTATION

Many students expressed difficulties in locating and transporting groceries from the store to their homes. This may be due to the remoteness of ethnic grocery stores to the University of Alberta in conjunction with limited public transport to some of these stores.

“I wish I could drive so that I could get groceries from ethnic stores. Those stores are quite far away from campus.”

-Student from Bangladesh

“Going to grocery store and carrying groceries back is a pain, so you can’t buy lots of stuff. I have to buy every week”

-Student from Indonesia



Healthy Lifestyle Festival © Ryan Conroy

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS MEAL PLANNING BARRIERS

- Hosting cooking classes that teach fundamental cooking skills along with basic meal planning that acknowledges a student's budget, ethnic diet, and the food landscape in Alberta.
- Create and make easily accessible digital bus route guides and maps that indicate how to obtain transportation to the specific ethnic grocery stores.
- Create grocery bus programming that provides free transportation to and from campus and ethnic grocery stores.

2. BARRIERS SPECIFIC TO PURCHASING GROCERIES AND FOOD

The way we buy and store food varies depending on where we live. For example, in some countries grocery stores are replaced with local markets. In many of these local markets, one buys fruit by the item not weight, unlike Canada. Many international students surveyed were unfamiliar with the set-up of Canada's grocery stores and this impacted their purchasing habits. For example, some students didn't know how long it would take for an item to ripen or spoil in Edmonton which led them to over purchasing and then ultimately having to throw out food.

A) LANGUAGE

Food items vary by names across countries. For example, in Mexico, 'chili' refers to the actual chili pepper. A student from Mexico told us that when she asked for chili in the grocery store, she was handed canned chili, which is a spicy stew. Not knowing the English names for food was a significant barrier for some students to find the items they needed to cook their ethnic food.

"I didn't know how to weigh food using scales because back home we were charged by number of items."

-Student from Japan

"It (grocery shopping) was a learning experience since I didn't know how to grocery shop, i.e., I didn't know how much to buy."

-Student from Mombasa, Kenya

B) UNFAMILIAR FOOD

In Canada, we have many types of produce and grocery items that may not be sold in other parts of the world. There are also items that may not resemble their counterparts in other countries. As one student from Brazil expressed, "Foods in grocery stores here [in Canada] are more diverse than back home." Unfamiliarity of foods found in the grocery store as well as not knowing which Alberta items may substitute for the ethnic items for which they were seeking, was a barrier for some students to buy groceries.

"I go to [the] grocery store a lot to buy veggies and I don't know how to [cook certain] veggies so I have to ask someone how to cook them. [This] is embarrassing."

-Student from Henan, China

C) UNFAMILIAR PACKAGING OF FOOD

Thirteen of 31 students individually surveyed indicated that unfamiliarity with the variety and packaging of food here in Canada was a barrier to accessing culturally relevant and nutritious foods.

“Seafood at home (Malaysia) is fresh and here [in Canada] it’s frozen and packaged. I’m not used to this.”

-Student from Malaysia

“With milk, cartons are weird to open because back home [we] had plastic bags [of milk].”

-Student from Shandong, China.

d) UNDERSTANDING HOW FOOD IS PRICED

When asked what factors students consider when they are buying food in the grocery stores the top answer by far was price; however, many students also expressed frustration over not understanding how food was priced and why food prices change so rapidly in Canada. Understanding pricing would help students to make better purchases.

e) PURCHASING NUTRITIONALLY EQUIVALENT FOOD

Students often reported lack of knowledge around nutritional quality of Canadian grocery store food. For example, in certain parts of the world tomatoes taste and smell differently than Canadian grocery store tomatoes. The different taste, or lack of taste, can lead students to stop buying fruits and vegetables because they do not know how to equate them to food back home or they think the fruits are fake or foreign.

“I think the biggest challenge for me was that the vegetables and fruits do not taste the same as ours.”

-Student from Romania.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS FOOD PURCHASING BARRIERS

- Creating grocery tours or a grocery buddy program for international students on campus. Such programs would show students how to navigate in Canadian grocery stores to find the items they are seeking. Such programs could teach students the names of common vegetables, fruits and key non perishables popular in their cooking and also common substitutes in Canada.
- The University of Alberta could provide cooking classes and other workshops that allow students an opportunity to touch, feel, and taste food identified as unfamiliar, as well as learn how to prepare them and incorporate these food items into their diet.
- International students would benefit from education around how food is priced, and what factors influence price such as season, whether the food is imported, or a status food. Students need to be able to gauge what is reasonably priced and to be able to prepare a grocery budget accordingly.
- English as a Second Language (ESL) classes should incorporate grocery language into their curriculum.

3. BARRIERS AROUND COOKING CULTURALLY FAMILIAR FOODS

A) ACCESSIBILITY TO FAMILIAR POTS, PANS AND APPLIANCES

Many students cited differences in cooking methods and appliances as a barrier to cooking nutritious meals. Different cuisines require different utensils or appliances; some, such as rice and pressure cookers are not easily available in Canada. Students stated it was hard to learn how to use some Western appliances, such as electric stoves or a gas oven. Cost was another barrier as it prevented some students from buying the required utensils to cook their ethnic meals. In addition, many students mentioned they did not know where to purchase the utensils or appliances they needed.

“I didn’t know how to use a can opener and I felt embarrassed by this. Sometimes I see utensils in Sears and the Bay and don’t know how to use them.”

– Student from Henan, China

“It would be useful to show us how to use Western pans.”

– Student from South Korea

B) BASIC COOKING SKILLS

Before learning to cook a meal, it is important to learn how to break down the components. Twenty-nine of 45 students indicated difficulties with cooking when they first arrived on campus. In many cultures cooking is a family activity, so cooking alone on campus was a new and often daunting experience for students. Several students mentioned that when they tried to cook it did not taste good and this would further motivate them to eat out or purchase unhealthy meals.

“I wish I knew how not to burn food, I don’t know how to measure things like salt and butter.”

– Student from Kuwait

“I didn’t know how to process or cook certain foods when I first came here, like ribs, pork, and beef. I also struggled with how much salt to put in a meal and how much water is needed to cook rice.”

– Student from Shandong, China

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS BARRIERS AROUND COOKING CULTURALLY FAMILIAR FOOD

- Incorporate the use of ovens into cooking programming.
Many students reported that they never used an oven back home and thus were unfamiliar with this appliance. Because students generally found that a lack of time to shop and cook was a barrier to eating healthy, ovens can be useful in allowing students to cook dishes like rice, casseroles, pasta, lasagna, etc., while studying at their dining room table. Effective use of the oven can lead to better time management in preparing and cooking meals.
- Develop and maintain an Appliance Library.
Appliances and utensils used in cooking can be very pricey. Unfortunately, many international students do not have funds to purchase the utensils needed to make home cooked meals, and others see buying utensils as a waste because they cannot bring them back home. The creation of an appliance/utensil library on campus would require the University of Alberta to purchase these items. The utensils could then be rented out to students. This resource could also serve as a place where students could ask information about appliances/utensils and learn how to use them in preparing/cooking meals.

“I had to buy all pots and pans which made cooking hard.”

–Student from Indonesia

“[I]m used to cooking with a pressure cooker but that is too expensive here. It would be nice if [the] university had a renting program for cooking vessels.”

–Student from Brazil

4. BARRIERS TO CONSUMING FOOD OR PURCHASING FOOD FROM CAMPUS VENDORS

A) LANGUAGE BARRIERS

When going out to eat some students felt embarrassed because they did not know how to pronounce words on the menu, leading to them not being able to communicate what they wanted to eat.

“When I first got here I went to an Italian restaurant and didn’t know how to pronounce words. I didn’t know if I could point to items on the menu and I felt embarrassed.”

–Student from Henan, China

B) ISOLATION

For many international students, their first time eating alone is on campus, and this can be overwhelming and distressing. As a result, students may eat out more, opting for unhealthy options, so that they are not eating meals alone.

“I started eating out more because it was easier [people were around me]. I felt isolated because in Mexico I always ate dinner with family, not alone.”

–Student from Mexico

“In many Asian cultures families eat dinner together and so the first experience eating food here for many international students is eating alone, which creates feelings of loneliness which can affect the student’s mental health.”

–Student from Shandong, China

C) NAMES FOR DIFFERENT DIETARY PATTERNS (VEGAN, VEGETARIAN, HALAL, KOSHER)

International students may be unfamiliar with the dietary preferences common in Canada. For example, in some countries, vegan diets do not exist and in others the same diet may go by a different name. This becomes a barrier when students RSVP for events as they may be unsure how to phrase their meal preferences.

“Back home there is no veggie/vegan/dairy restriction so I didn’t know what this meant and there was also no concept of fair trade.”

–Student from Malaysia

“[I’d like]to understand different food descriptions and what the differences are between them (kosher, vegetarian, vegan, gluten free, lactose intolerant). This would have made it easier for me to go to events where I don’t understand [these distinctions] and thus don’t know what to choose from .”

–Student from Malaysia

D) OPTIONS AVAILABLE ON CAMPUS

Some students stated that there was a lack of accessible ethnic food options to purchase on campus which led to them not being able to continue their ethnic diets from back home.

“I often resort to eating the veggie delight option for Subway because there is no good place for vegetarian food on campus.”

–Student from India

“I wish it was true (that eating foods from my upbringing played role in my current diet). The reason this isn’t true is because it’s hard to find options to eat ethnic food. There was an Indian Food Place in Hub but it closed; it was a place I went to buy food when I was homesick.”

–Student from United Arab Emirates

E) RESIDENCE MEAL PLANS

Meal plans are provided to students living on specific campus residences to help support them in their academics through enabling them to spend more time on school work and activities and less time on cooking. Many international students found few opportunities to eat any ethnic food as part of their meal options. Students commented that the meal plan helped save time and they recognize not everyone’s preferences can be satisfied.

“The meal plan made life easy, as I did not have to worry about grocery shopping or meal preparation.”

–Student from Mombasa, Kenya

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS BARRIERS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TO BUY ETHNIC FOOD FROM FOOD VENDORS OR RESTAURANTS

- Hosting more ‘family style’ or ‘cultural night’ dinners on campus, especially in residence. This creates opportunities for students to eat together and share their cultures, which would help broaden cultural exchange through food and decrease feelings of isolation.

“It would be helpful if UAI⁸ hosted potluck or family dinners or a massive cooking class but I acknowledge that it is a challenge to accommodate everyone’s needs.”

–Student from Shandong, China

- Make dietary options more clear in University programming. For instance, when creating RSVP forms for events, especially those geared towards international students, give more description of the dietary options available for choice. For example: Vegan (no animal products used in the food).
- Many ethnic stores and restaurants are not near campus. By inviting local ethnic vendors to come to campus and sell their food we can help students feel more at home and promote local businesses.

“Why not contact vendors -- for example there’s an Indian lady downtown who sells lunch packets that we could distribute on campus.”

–Student from India

⁸ UAI stands for University of Alberta International, a service on campus to support international students.

This next section is written for campus services and staff who are involved in developing programming for international students, especially as it regards to healthy eating. We have summarized students' overall recommendations to support them in accessing culturally relevant and nutritious foods. Based on the information from the students we interviewed, three salient recommendations emerged.

1. CREATE PROGRAMMING THAT IS APPLICABLE AND APPEALING TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

- Use different teaching methods to appeal to international students. For example, Youtube videos, visuals, and experiential learning activities might help to better engage international students on topics around accessing and eating nutritious meals.

"Videos about the good way of eating, and seminars that are fun, could help students too."

- Student from Iran

"Years ago there was a table in SUB that showcased the amount of sugar in juice and water and pop, coffee, tea, wine. The visual made me stop drinking pop. For international students visuals are effective tools more so than workshops and written documents alone."

- Student from Shandong, China

"Use visuals [these help with language barriers] like the ones already done that teach you how many cups of coffee [are] good for health."

- Student from Guangdong, China

- Target key messaging in programming to what resonates with international students. For example, to get students to be mindful of the food they consume, consider shifting the key message from how food is related to physical wellbeing to how healthy eating relates to academic performance.

"Key messaging for international students [should] be on how diet affects academic performance [because] international students may put diet at the bottom of their priorities because of school."

- Student from Brazil

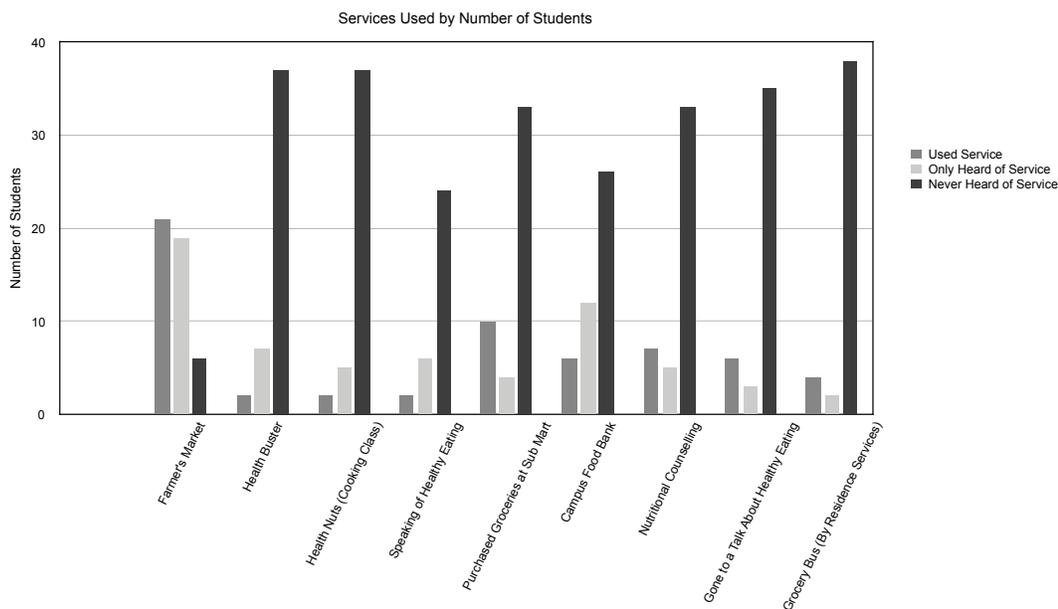
- Create resources in different languages to make programming more welcoming and approachable for students.

"Provide resources in different languages. Although it is the student's responsibility to learn to understand English, having someone speak to them in their native language is a good way for them to feel comfortable and be more willing to learn about eating healthy."

- Student from Brunei Darussalam



2. METHODS TO PROMOTE SERVICES AND RESOURCES SHOULD UTILIZE COMMUNICATION CHANNELS CURRENTLY USED BY STUDENTS



This graph depicts service/program utilization by international students for nutritional and healthy eating services/programming provided at the University of Alberta in 2016. Services/programs in bold are run by students.

Service Descriptions: Health Busters was a grocery bus program run by students that ran for a year, offering students free round trips between campus and Superstores. Health Nuts is a student group that offers cooking classes on campus for a small fee. Speaking of Healthy Eating is a free workshop series run by students studying nutrition on various topics as it relates to diet and healthy eating. SUBmart is a small convenience store located on campus. Nutritional Counseling is done with a registered dietitian and is free service for students.

Make services more accessible so students can buy ethnic groceries. [For example, promote services] at orientation and with emails to new students, especially for international students, at the beginning of term, to tell students where they can buy groceries.”

-Student from United Arab Emirates

*One student answered not applicable when asked if they utilized grocery buses organized by campus services, the Campus Food Bank, and nutritional counseling.



Pass the Grub © Juban Sonin

3. PROVIDE SOCIAL SUPPORTS FOR STUDENTS

We found that if students had social support, they faced less barriers to accessing culturally relevant and nutritious foods. Campus could offer “food mentors,” “advocates” or “peers” who can direct students to grocery stores, food vendors, and places to obtain appliances and utensils. This will help students transition to Canada’s food landscape. In fact, students who had peers already in Canada or friends to show them around were more confident in accessing grocery stores, cooking meals, and finding appliances. Even if students did not have a social network here, the ability to phone home and get advice on cooking meals helped alleviate a lot of the barriers listed in this document.

“I was very lucky to have a really good landlady who taught me how to shop. I knew what I needed to prepare food, but I was not sure where to get the ingredients. I would also email my mom and she would send me receipts through email.”

-Student from Romania

“Maybe even have a group at the international center where more senior students come and tell the new students where they get their foods, how they cook, etc.”

-Student from Romania

Many students will try to seek help from ethnic groups or friends. Working closer with these groups on campus and providing them with the information and knowledge on common barriers international students face will build these groups' capacity to help incoming and current students who are struggling.

“I found it hard to find a good source of protein first month I was here so I ate a lot of eggs. It was hard to find halal stores in the first couple months so I had to ask Malaysian students and the Muslim community “

-Student from Malaysia

Food is much more than a nutritious substance. It connects us to culture, community, and identity. Food excites all the senses, can evoke positive memories, and add a sense of belonging. This is the way international students at the University of Alberta engage with food. As such it is imperative that campuses support students in cooking their ethnic meals while also helping them learn to adapt to Alberta's food landscape. Through recreating ethnic meals on campus, we are supporting cultural sustainability and enhancing student's knowledge of various cultures. In this way food contributes to a thriving campus.

To find out more about the outcomes from this study or to access resources to help run programming at your campus or in your community visit <http://www.conversecook.com>.



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If you would like more information about this research project, or are interested in some of the upcoming activities as a result from this project you can email me, Juanita Gnanapragasam, at [gnanpra \[at\] ualberta.ca](mailto:gnanpra@ualberta.ca) or visit <http://www.conversecook.com>.

This report was designed by Edmonton local designer Bianca Ho.