

FOOD INSECURITY AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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International Student Mental Health Virtual Summit

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Organizer: Centre for Innovation in Mental Health



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Background

- Food insecurity is the inadequate or insecure access to food because of financial constraints.
- The proliferation of campus food banks indicates that many students are food-insecure
- Student groups at risk for food insecurity
 - Canadian students from low to median income families
 - Students with children
 - Indigenous students
 - International students
- Campus services and federal and provincial policies to alleviate student food insecurity are needed.

Outcomes of food insecurity



Nutrition and Physical Health

- Nutrient insufficiency
- Chronic health conditions
- Poor self-rated health
- Obese or overweight



Mental Health

- Anxiety
- Distress
- Depression
- Learning disabilities among children

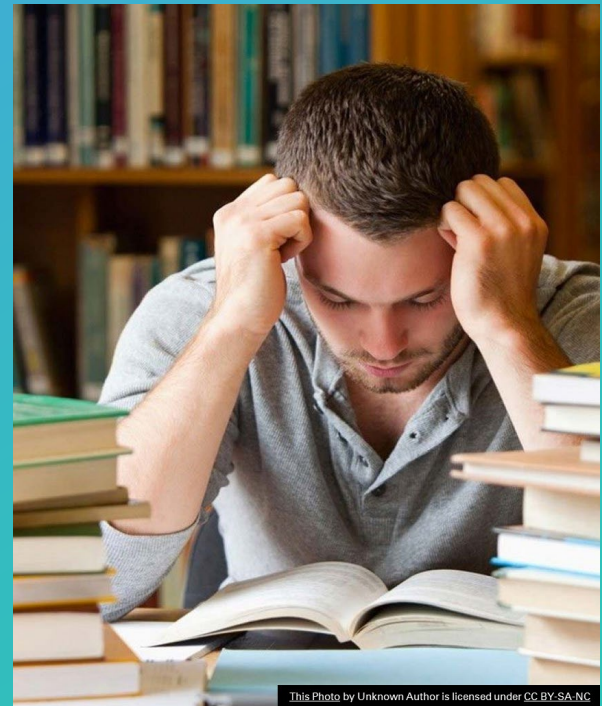


Academic consequences of food insecurity for university students



How often have you done the following when you didn't have enough money for food?

Could not concentrate in class or in an exam	55.2%
Unable to study for an exam	19.0%
Unable to complete an assignment	8.6%





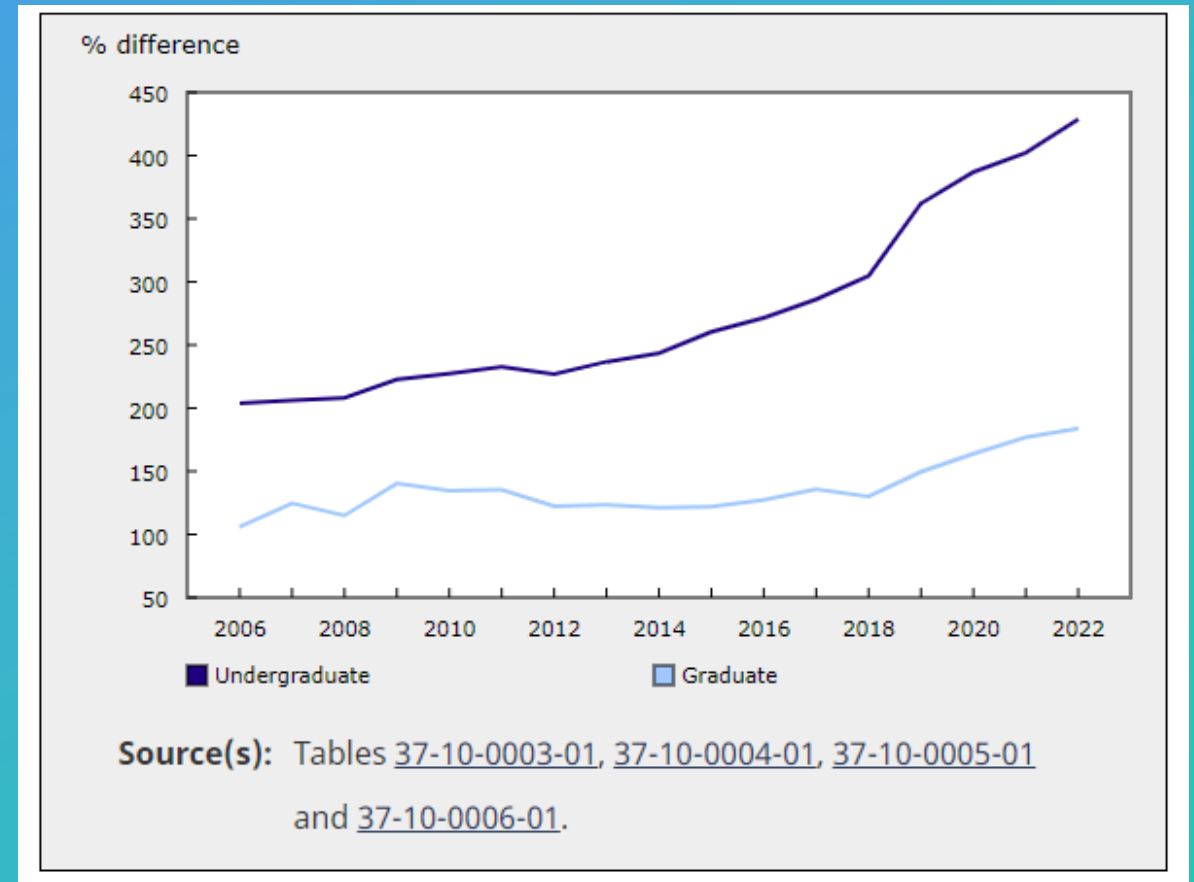
**WHY DOES FOOD
INSECURITY EXIST
AMONG
INTERNATIONAL
STUDENTS?**

Post-
secondary
education has
become less
affordable



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RELATIVE DIFFERENCES IN TUITION FEES BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND DOMESTIC STUDENTS, CANADA, 2006 TO 2022



Cost of an education

- Tuition is not the only cost that students bear
 - Books, Devices (Tablets, Computers) (Fixed)
 - Accommodation (rent) (Fixed)
 - Transportation (Fixed)
 - Utilities, communication charges (Fixed)
 - Compulsory fees (Fixed)
 - Food and clothing (Flexible)

Cost of groceries and accommodations is rising

- Canadians paid 9.7% more for food purchases between April 2021 and April 2022, representing the largest increase since September 1981.
- Shelter costs (rent) has also risen at the fastest pace since 1983.

- Source: Statistics Canada. Tuition fees for degree programs, 2022/2023.
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220907/dq220907b-eng.htm>

Food requirements of international students

Cultural foods: e.g., Chinese, South Asian, African, Latin American

Religious foods

Muslims: Halal
(no pork, alcohol, ritually slaughtered)

Jewish: Kosher
(no pork, ritually slaughtered)

Buddhist, Seventh Day Adventist: Vegetarian

Hindus: No beef

FOOD BANKS AS A RESPONSE TO STUDENT FOOD INSECURITY





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Campus food banks

- There has been a proliferation of food banks on campuses in the past 25 years.
- The numbers of students who are affected by food insecurity are many times higher than the number of students using food banks.
- Food banks are not the solution to student hunger!



University of Alberta campus food bank

- A registered charity dedicated to eliminating hunger on campus.
- Historically the food bank gave pre-packaged food hampers to students with limited options to swap out items.
- The CFB's food options have been limited to mostly western food items.
- Has more recently (2022) switched to a grocery store model.

Relies on donated food and other items

**GIVE THANKS
FOOD DRIVE**

Drop your donations off at the GSA office in Triffo Hall

**22 SEPTEMBER TO
6 OCTOBER**

**Help the GSA help the
Campus Food Bank**

Donate:

- Canned Meats (eg. tuna)
- Canned Fruits and Vegetables
- Peanut Butter
- Beans (without sauce)
- Cereal
- Brown Rice
- Whole Wheat Pasta
- Pasta Sauce
- Rolled Oats (instant oats)
- Tampons and pads
- Diapers
- or other non-perishable items



Nutrition of Food Hampers

- Fat and animal protein content was low.
- The requirements of milk and alternatives; meat and alternatives are not met.
- Vitamin A and zinc recommendations were not met.
- Nutrients missing from the food hampers could be provided from fresh fruits, vegetables, dairy, and meat products.
 - Jessri M et al. Nutritional Quality and Price of Food Hampers Distributed by a Campus Food Bank: A Canadian Experience. *J Health Popul Nutr.* Jun 2014; 32(2): 287-300.
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- + • Food insecurity among international students accessing the campus food bank

- We conducted individual semi-structured interviews with students to describe students' perceptions of (1) challenges to attaining food security, (2) consequences of food insecurity on the university experience, and (3) food received from the food bank



Challenges to obtaining sufficient food

1. Logistical issues
 - a lack of time to prepare healthy and cultural meals
 - limited family and close friend support
 - no one to help with grocery shopping and meal preparation
 - no one to rely on if students ran out of food
 - “Challenges as an international student, I would say you don’t really have much relatives and friends when you run out you could go to. The lack of family support”
 - Unemployment/underemployment
 - student visa restrictions limited where and how much they could work, and jobs prioritized those with a Canadian citizenship



Challenges to obtaining sufficient food

2. Obtaining culturally appropriate food

- lack of availability
- limited accessibility to sources of culturally appropriate food
 - grocery stores and restaurants that sell cultural foods are not accessible as a result of the distance and time required for access, especially without a car or when using public transit
- not affordable



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Consequences of food insecurity on the University experience

1. Impaired academic performance
 - Inability to concentrate on schoolwork, focus during lectures, or be successful in writing exams.
 - Missing classes or exams, sometimes due to extreme food deprivation.

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Consequences of food insecurity on the University experience

2. Negative well-being

- Physical well-being
 - Extreme food deprivation and hunger physically manifested as feeling weak, cold, and lacking in energy
- Mental well-being
 - Students reported that not having enough food had negative psychological impacts, leading to feelings of “anger,” “stress,” “worry,” “impatience,” and “anxiety”
 - “I am always thinking about food that you know, I have foods for the week or for tomorrow or for breakfast what I am gonna do for breakfast?... And you know it’s extra stress for you to deal with”
 - “I keep worrying oh what I am going to eat for tomorrow, like for 2 weeks what I am going to eat, like I am starving”
- Social well-being
 - Social withdrawal due to food insecurity and lack of energy

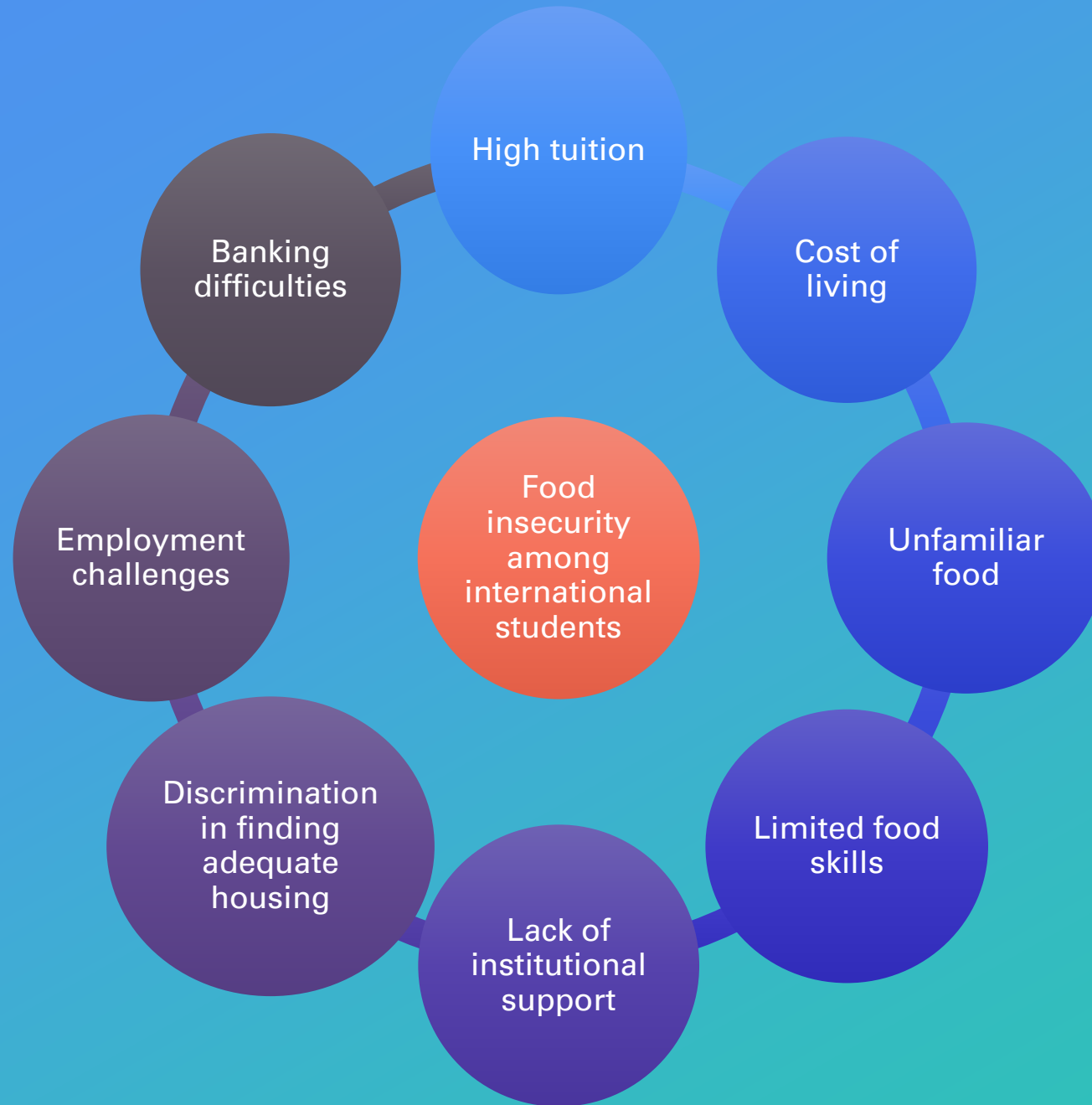
Perceptions of food in hampers



- “Only thing is at the beginning that I found some foods that I didn't really use because I am Hindu and we didn't eat beef and sometimes like canned food or the noodles or whatever they have beef flavour.”

**SOLUTIONS TO
FOOD
INSECURITY FOR
INTERNATIONAL
STUDENTS**





The background of the slide features a teal-to-blue gradient with silhouettes of graduates in caps and gowns. Some graduates are holding their caps high in the air. In the upper right quadrant, there are three small white icons: a plus sign (+), a solid dot (•), and an open circle (○).

Solutions to food insecurity for international students

- Have more scholarships offered by Canadian governments, post-secondary institutions, non-governmental organizations and international organizations
- Reduce tuition fees
- Enable students to work more hours (double-edged sword)
 - From November 15, 2022, until December 31, 2023 international students may be eligible to work more than 20 hours per week off campus under a temporary public policy.

+ • Campus
o Food
Banks
offer
different
service
models

- The CFB at the University of Alberta has switched to a grocery store model, in which students can browse the CFB's shelves and pick the food they want.
- The new model may better serve the university's large international student population.
 - <https://www.ualberta.ca/sustainability/about/news-profiles/2022/11-november/campus-food-bank-switches-to-more-dignified-grocery-store-model.html>



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- Alberta Innovates – Health Solutions



Student publications

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