

Food Security at Trent University

Key Results from the 2016-2017 Food Access Survey

As part of an honours thesis project, a survey about food security among first-year students was conducted under the supervision of Dr. Chris Furgal at Trent University. The survey included questions about: food access, challenges to accessing food, and self-perceived health.

One of the main goals of the survey was to measure “Food Security and Insecurity” levels among full-time first-year Trent students living independently away from home. Measuring students’ food access is a way to understand their ability to afford enough of the foods they need, want and prefer to eat on a regular basis to be healthy and active, especially during the academic year. This is done by using survey responses to classify students into 4 food security and insecurity categories.



Why was the study done?

Food security is recognized as a growing problem in developed countries especially as it affects nutrition among vulnerable populations, such as post-secondary students. Research has shown that is critical to have proper nutrition to support student learning and academic success. Our research project examined the factors affecting food security and its implications for student health among full-time first-year university students living independently away from home. The results can be used to effectively address and research food issues on campus in order to improve students food access and academic performance.

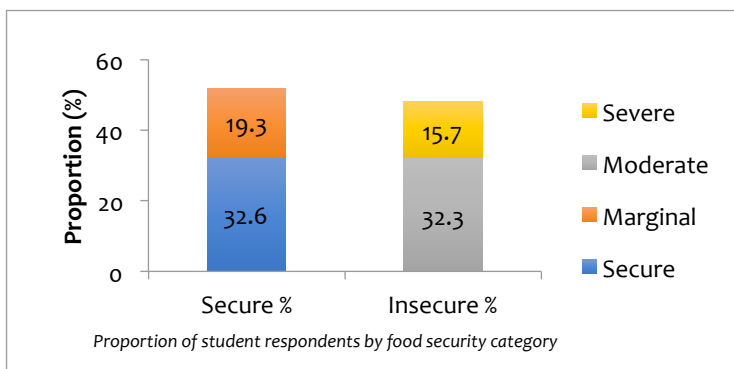
How was the survey done at Trent?

Using Qualtrics, via email announcements, recruitment of participants began mid-February 2017 until April 2017. A total of 331 students were eligible to participate. Participants answered The Trent Food Access Survey (TFAS) about their ability and challenges to access food, as well as their self-perceived physical and mental health, and academic performance. Questions included the food security scale questions mentioned on page 2.

Results Summary: 6 key findings

Participants were asked questions about their individual food access during the previous semester (Fall 2016). The questions asked about a range of issues pertaining to access to food, the possibility of running out or cutting meals based on lack of money, to experiencing hunger. This handout presents highlights of some key results identified from the survey. A full report with all results is produced and will be available through the research group website Health, Environment and Indigenous Communities Research Group (www.heicresearch.com).

1. What is the prevalence of food (in)security at Trent University?



Our study determined the prevalence of food security among full-time Trent University student respondents in their first-year living away from home as being 48.0% (159 out of 331 students) Food Insecure. This number represents student respondents that were Moderately Food Insecure and Severely Food Insecure. This number is also higher than findings from recent studies conducted at Canadian, American and Australian universities.



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What do the different food security categories mean?

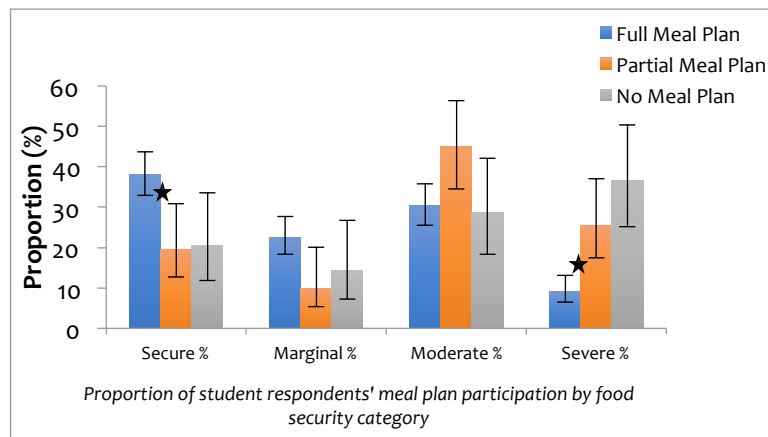
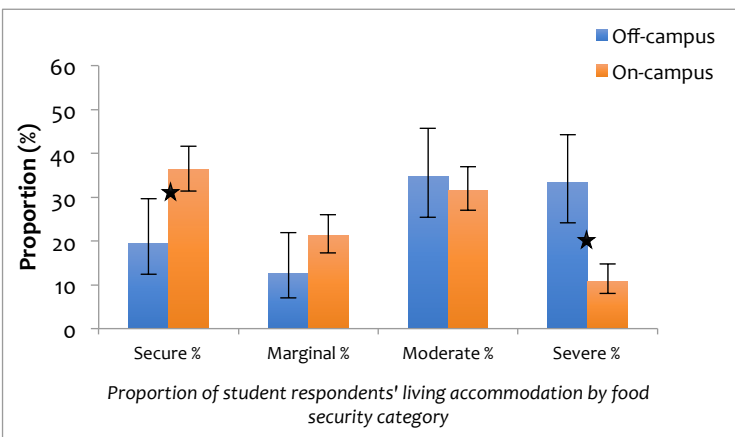
To measure food security levels, the survey used selected questions from a standardized 18-item Household Food Security Survey Module (HFSSM) in the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) administered by Statistics Canada. The survey asks about the ability of students to access food. This is the same scale that was used in the Trent Food Access Survey, and that is widely used across the country. Based on responses to the questions in the survey, each participant was categorized as Food Secure, Marginally Food Secure, Moderately Food Insecure or Severely Food Insecure.

Food Secure	Marginally Food Secure	Moderately Food Insecure	Severely Food Insecure
No report of income-related problems of food access during the previous semester (Fall 2016).	Either reported that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - they had been worried about running out of food in the previous semester OR - they limited their food selection in the previous semester because of a lack of money for food 	Reported that: they had compromised the quality and/or quantity of food eaten in the past semester due to a lack of money for food.	Reported disrupted eating patterns, miss meals, reduced food intake, and at the most extreme, go a whole day without food in the past semester due to a lack of money for food.

2. What this means at the individual level.

Twelve percent of respondents (40 students) reported that in the past semester they often worried that their food would run out before they had money to buy more. Among survey respondents, 32.0% (105 students) had skipped or cut the size of their meals; and 6.0% (21 students) have not eaten for a whole day because they did not have enough money for food. When asked, 76.0% (253 students) felt they had enough to eat, but not the kind of food they wanted.

3. How do living accommodation and meal plan participation influence food (in)security?



Visual inspection of confidence intervals marked by a * (star) to show a statistical significance within and/or between categories.

A large proportion of respondents living on campus 57.5% (149 students) and others having access to a meal plan 61.0% (140 students) were categorized as food secure. Among students without a meal plan, 65.3% (32 students) were found to be food insecure. Statistical analysis supported this association between food security status and student respondents living accommodation and meal plan participation.

4. What about financial support?

Nearly half of the population of student respondents, receiving some sort of government funding, was found to be food secure; however, a significant proportion were classified as moderately food insecure. Similarly, a significant number of students working part-time were also classified as moderately food insecure.

5. How is food security related to mental health?

Respondents were asked about their mental health (anxiety/emotional exhaustion). A greater proportion of students reporting 'excellent', 'very good', or 'good' mental health were found to be food secure than insecure. The majority of those reporting 'poor' mental health were found to be food insecure.

6. How does food security affect students' abilities to keep up with schoolwork?

Respondents indicating their ability to keep up with school work as 'excellent', 'very good', and 'good' were more likely to be food secure. While those declaring their ability as 'poor' were more likely to be food insecure.

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