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Food Insecurity at the University of Denver: A Qualitative Exploratory Study to Identify Challenges and Opportunities for Improvements Around Food Insecurity on DU's Campus

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The purpose of this course-based research project was to understand students' perceptions and opinions about student food insecurity on the University of Denver campus.

Food Insecurity at the University of Denver

A Qualitative Exploratory
Study to Identify Challenges
and Opportunities for
Improvements Around Food
Insecurity on DU's Campus

*Edited by Amanda Cali and Clayton
Kempf for the Spring 2024 ANTH 2424
The Social Determination of Health course*

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University of Denver

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Executive Summary

Food Insecurity at the University of Denver: A Qualitative Exploratory Study to Identify Challenges and Opportunities for Improvements Around Food Insecurity on DU's Campus

Edited by Alejandro Cerón, Amanda Cali, and Clayton Kempf for the Spring 2024 ANTH 2424: Social Determination of Health course.

The purpose of this course-based research project was to understand students' perceptions and opinions about student food insecurity on the University of Denver campus, identifying challenges and opportunities for improvement, with the hope that the results will support the DU community's efforts to prevent and address food insecurity on DU's campus. Twenty-eight DU students were interviewed in April-May 2024 and the interview transcripts were analyzed qualitatively.

Previous research findings demonstrate that many college students are facing food insecurity and that the causes for this are multifactorial (Adamovic et al 2022; Fortin et al 2021; Nikolaus et al 2020; Peterson & Freidus 2020; Regan 2020; Zigmont et al 2021). Students are unable to obtain suitable food to meet their needs because of insufficient financial resources, limited ability to manage their time availability, and barriers to transportation, as well as other circumstances. Food insecurity is a consequence of complex dynamics that go beyond monetary constraints (Nikolaus et al 2020; Zigmont et al 2021). Efforts to understand college student food insecurity have largely focused on investigating demographic factors that are associated with higher rates of food insecurity and have suggested solutions that involve improving awareness of and access to resources, for example campus food pantries (Adamovic et al 2022; Regan 2020). However, some scholars have argued that this stress on individual level factors and solutions can generate stigma or bring shame on some of the students using pantries and similar programs. Some scholars argue that college student food insecurity should not be conceived in terms of the factors affecting individual students but in terms of how the institutional context of the university creates the conditions that make some students more likely to be food insecure, and at the same time abandons the goal of doing something to change those structures that generate food insecure students (Peterson & Freidus 2023; Peterson & Freidus 2020; Peterson et al 2022; Regan 2020; Stebleton et al 2020; Zigmont et al 2021).

The students in ANTH 2424: The Social Determination of Health class used thematic analysis to analyze the interviews and find the most prominent themes, highlighting quotes from several interviews to show an understanding students' perceptions, opinions, and experiences surrounding food insecurity on DU's campus. Interviewees brought many issues to light, such as the lack of dietary accommodations for students with allergies and students needing religious and cultural accommodations, accessibility to ingredient knowledge, inadequate dining hall operating hours, frustration with how the C-Store is operated as well as its hours of operation, and consistent problems with Sodexo's Everyday app. Our study also found that there is an overall lack of awareness on DU's campus about the food pantry and details associated with it. Students also reported a lack of meal planning and budgeting knowledge. College is a big adjustment for most students, especially regarding their access to food.

Our findings coincide with recommendations found in other research studies focusing on food insecurity on college campuses. These recommendations include increased access to healthy and fresh foods, healthier options in dining halls, better food pantry hours, rebranding the food pantry and relocating the food pantry, dorm-friendly options in the food pantry, easier access to groceries through more reliable transportation, a desire for more affordable foods on campus, extending dining hall hours, extending hours of the C-Store (Corner Stores, located in Nelson Hall and Centennial Halls), and education on life skills such as time management, cooking, and meal planning. The dining hall, C-store, and food pantry all need better hours that allow for students to adequately plan around getting food from them. Regarding the C-Store hours specifically, having the C-Store open 24/7 would allow students to have access at their convenience rather than closing the store at midnight. A shuttle to nearby grocery stores or a program that incentivizes grocery delivery to campus dorms and residences would also be beneficial to students. Interviewees also recommend DU offer meal planning, budgeting, and cooking programs for students.

The main findings and recommendations of our exploratory study coincide with these general recommendations while also offering insights that are specific to DU. These findings and recommendations should be understood in the context of the exploratory nature of the study, and not as definitive findings that describe the current situation. However, the findings suggest some important avenues for the DU community to explore further or take action. We reiterate that our hope with this course-based exploratory research project is to contribute to the efforts that the DU community needs to continue making, so that food insecurity is addressed in meaningful ways that are sensible and empathetic towards students and cultivate a culture of accessibility and transparency.

Introduction

by Amanda Cali and Clayton Kempf

The purpose of this course-based research project was to identify issues in food accessibility for University of Denver (DU) students, identifying challenges and opportunities for improvement, with the hope that the results will support the DU community's efforts to address food insecurity. Recommendations will be made in the hopes that faculty and staff of DU will take these recommendations and issues seriously and aim to address them.

This project was part of the ANTH 2424 Social Determination of Health course (Spring 2024), and the 28 students who took the class participated in the project design, data collection, data analysis, and report writing. The project's design was exploratory, cross-sectional, and qualitative. We interviewed 28 key informants who met the inclusion criteria of being students whose student status at DU gives them first-hand insights into DU's food accessibility. We interviewed students who lived both on-campus and off-campus. We do not offer more details about student participants to keep their identities confidential. We conducted semi-structured interviews (see annex for the model interview guide), audio recorded and transcribed. Audios were destroyed after transcription. No personal information was recorded, and audios and transcripts did not include any information with the potential of breaching anonymity. The project followed DU's Office of Research Integrity and Education's guidelines for course-related research. The interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis.

The main findings of our exploratory study coincide with larger findings in other research studies focusing on food insecurity on college campuses, including the interconnectedness of food insecurity to factors such as financial barriers, a lack of time for cooking and eating, and that food insecurity is both a health and social issue (Zigmont et al 2021). Our findings also coincide with recommendations found in other research studies focusing on food insecurity on college campuses. These recommendations include increased access to healthy and fresh foods, healthier options in dining halls, better food pantry hours, dorm-friendly options in the food pantry, easier access to groceries through more reliable transportation, a desire for more affordable foods on campus, extending dining hall hours, extending hours of the C-Store (Corner Stores, located in Nelson Hall and Centennial Halls), and education on life skills such as time management, cooking, and meal planning.

Our findings also offer insights that are specific to DU, which we summarize here:

- General difficulties among students accessing reliable information at the dining halls pertaining to accurate food labeling and enough description of what is in the food.
- Many students are unaware of the food pantry on campus. Students have difficulty with the hours of operation and finding a time they can make it to the food pantry, along with negative stigmas that go alongside food insecurity limit the desirability and accessibility of the food pantry. Students living on campus and who have received food from the food pantry have been given food that requires a kitchen to make, that of which many students don't have access to.
- Limited options for purchasing food exist near campus. Students without reliable transportation find it difficult to buy groceries and those without jobs have limited resources to find food options outside their meal plan.
- Students find the on-campus C-store hours challenging to work around their schedules, along with finding expired food.

- Unreliable Everyday app. Sodexo is DU's on-campus dining provider and their app, called Everyday, is designed to be a resource for dining needs, allowing students to view the menu ahead of time, order food ahead of time, and check hours of on-campus dining options. The app is often lacking nutritional information regarding menu items and does not accurately reflect the hours of on-campus dining options.
- Accommodations for dietary restrictions are limited and access to food that fits various dietary needs is challenging for students to find on campus. These challenges are made worse by certain dining hall locations having limited hours, further limiting diversity in food options.
- Students find themselves choosing between eating and attending class and/or doing assignments and largely end up prioritizing their academics over food.

Our findings coincide with recommendations found in other research studies focusing on food insecurity on college campuses. These recommendations include increased access to healthy and fresh foods, healthier options in dining halls, better food pantry hours, dorm-friendly options in the food pantry, easier access to groceries through more reliable transportation, a desire for more affordable foods on campus, extending dining hall hours, extending hours of the C-Store (Corner Stores, located in Nelson Hall and Centennial Halls), and education on life skills such as time management, cooking, and meal planning. The dining hall, C-store, and food pantry all need better hours that allow for students to adequately plan around getting food from them. Regarding the C-Store hours specifically, having the C-Store open 24/7 would allow students to have access at their convenience rather than closing the store at midnight. A shuttle to nearby grocery stores or a program that incentivizes grocery delivery to campus dorms and residences would also be beneficial to students. Interviewees also recommend DU offer meal planning, budgeting, and cooking programs for students.

The food pantry should be rebranded and relocated to promote people using the resource. Changing the name of the food pantry and moving the location to a more inviting and accessible space would be beneficial to students. Additionally, food quality and diversity in options should always be a priority to allow the most amount of people to enjoy the food options on campus. Being able to enjoy the food is as important as diversity in food options. If people do not enjoy the food or have difficulty eating it because of the lack in quality and nutritional value, then there was no point in offering the food in the first place.

Nutritional labels for food both in person at the dining hall and on the Everyday app need to be adequately updated and represent as much information as possible about the food. This way, students can know of any allergens and if they should stay away from any of the food for dietary reasons. An on-campus dietitian to help with accommodation and dietary needs should be available to students, rather than having the dietitian employed through Sodexo. The university should look after every food need rather than delegating these responsibilities to Sodexo. An interviewee shared that the Sodexo dietitian said there were too many restrictions they were giving them, and they would not be able to accommodate them. Any and all accommodations should be addressed with the utmost seriousness.

These findings and recommendations should be understood in the context of the exploratory nature of the study, and not as definitive findings that describe the current situation. However, the findings suggest some important avenues for the DU community to explore further or take action. We reiterate that our hope with this course-based exploratory research project is to contribute to the efforts that the DU community needs to continue making, so that food insecurity is addressed in meaningful ways that are sensible and empathetic towards students and cultivate a culture of accessibility and transparency.

Food Nutrition on DU's Campus

by: Siena Balzer

Introduction

The University of Denver is rated a C- on the "Campus Food" section on niche.com, a popular website that high school students look at when deciding on their future. This low rating could easily stray students from furthering their education at DU. Furthermore, the nutrition and food quality of the campus food is directly related to students' health and contentedness. How can an institution support their students when it is seemingly impossible for that student to realistically get all of the nutrients one needs?

In my Social Determinants of Health class, we were told to interview primarily junior and seniors who went to University of Denver on the subject of food insecurity. Through previous research and discussion, my group came up with main questions to base the interview around. For example, "Do you believe that you have access to healthy foods?" or "Are you ever worried about when your next meal will be?". Through reading and analyzing these interviews, my group found that there were many emerging themes. One that stood out in particular was the lack of food nutrition in the campus dining hall. Throughout the total of the interviews students continually raised complaints regarding the general lack of nutritional foods provided. Then students followed up by stating that the quality of these 'healthy foods' were poor. This resulted in many straying from the few nutritional options. The lack of staple healthy foods in students' diets has created many problems that deserve to be heard and resolved at Denver.

Students complain of the nutritional value of the meals served at Denver University. One after another when asked the first, simple question, "Do you have access to healthy foods?" students respond like "I do not think any of the foods is [are] the healthiest option," (Interview 7-1) or "I don't know if it's healthy or not" (interview 5-1). These quotes should be a major concern to the school. They state that a large group of students feel as though they have limited to no access to healthy foods at the dining hall. First year students are forced to buy a dining hall account. If this is the case, the university should ensure that students are getting the food that they request. Especially if it is as simple as general healthy options. Some students say that while there are some healthy options, "you have to put in effort to try to find food to get enough protein, vegetables, fruit, and dairy in one meal" (interview 6-1). Other students say that even the foods that are supposed to be healthy are cooked in ways that decrease their nutrition. For example, one student says that while the stir fry has both vegetables and proteins, "they use seed oils and those are not healthy" (Interview 9-1). This shows that even the foods that are supposed to be nutritional are not actually healthy and are hard to find. These factors leave students confused on what to eat at the dining hall when trying to eat healthy. One student describes this, "I often find myself wondering if it's just not as good or like the best option I could be doing for myself when it comes to nutrition" (Interview 12). Students are confused about what to eat and tired of having to put so much effort into finding nutritional options at a place they are forced to eat at.

The lack of nutrition leads to students getting or feeling sick after eating at the dining hall. One student explains how they feel sick after eating the food at the dining hall. When asked whether the individual thought this feeling was a result of cooking or ingredients, the interviewee stated, "definitely, it's probably be, like, cheap, low quality food...half the time it makes me just not feel great because it's not high quality of food," (interview 4-1). This quote shows that it is not food poisoning that is making students feel sick, it is the type of foods served

in general.

The lack of healthy foods at the Denver dining hall force students to buy their nutrition from outside sources. One student stated how it was nearly impossible to find healthy foods in the dining hall and this resulted in them going out of their way to buy different foods at grocery stores. One student describes this, saying, "Yeah, I, for the first two years living on campus, I utilized the dining hall. But I did not notice that there weren't a ton of healthy options. As well as, like, I was eating a lot less than I usually would. So, during mid sophomore year I started pivoting to buying my own groceries and kind of meal prepping," (Interview 1-1). Buying foods from outside sources can be extremely expensive, especially for college students that do not have a large income flow or support system. Having to go out of their way to buy other foods can lead to financial and mental stress for students. The same student further explains, "As someone who openly struggled with an eating disorder...I have really been striving to eat three meals a day, but oftentimes, I eat two meals a day mostly because I do buy my own groceries and it can be expensive to buy a variety of different foods," (Interview 1-1). This quote not only explains that this particular individual could not find healthy foods in the dining hall, so it resulted in them buying foods at a grocery store. Because of the extra expenses, the students are eating less than usual. If students cannot find healthy foods, this quote proves they are forced to go buy it elsewhere and that this results in less general food consumption.

Conclusion

The University of Denver has a problem and that is the lack of nutrition provided for students at the dining hall. Over and over again, students complained about the general lack of healthy foods and nutritional options. Even the students that believe that there are some healthy options say that the food options are not the best and extremely hard to access. Because of the lack of nutrition on campus, students often feel sick after eating dining hall meals. This leads to college students, who do not have the money to do so, buying food from outside sources. This is a deeply concerning issue that deserves to be heard on the Denver campus. Students deserve access to necessary nutrition.

Scheduling Impact on Food Insecurity

by: Karina Becerra-Lozano

Introduction

During this project, one of the questions that was in the interview guide was if the student's schedules impact their access to food. This question sparked an emerging theme of decision making as well as organizing their daily schedule to the tee to make sure they had time to make it to the dining hall to eat. However, what students did not have control of was the dining hall schedule because the students could have planned out their whole day, and they would go to the dining hall only to find out they only had the station open, or it was closed.

In interview 1, a student stated, "I think the less time I have in my schedule means the less time I have to like to eat...Like everybody's schedules are a little busy, which means inherently my food intake suffers with a busier schedule."

In interview 11, the student stated "I am in class, like straight through lunch the whole time...If I want to go to the dining hall after class, there's just nothing open. Sometimes they'll say that things are supposed to be open, and they're just not."

Interviewee in interview 6 said something similar to the student in interview 1 and 11. "Sometimes I feel like I have to do my homework to do other things, and by the time I'm done with my classes, extracurriculars, and my homework...dinner time is already over, or lunchtime has passed, and the times that I have free time like during the day it's transition periods so sometimes I go to the dining hall and there's just nothing open."

Because someone has a busy schedule sometimes, it makes it difficult to schedule in time to eat. With the many deadlines for assignments, classes to attend, and even events to attend there are unfortunately some sacrifices that students must make, and one of them is having time to eat. These students prioritize school and extracurriculars which leaves little to no time to eat. When they do find time to eat, the dining hall might have one station open lacking nutrients for students, but also might create it to be overcrowded causing those students that are in the rush to skip eating because of the time it takes.

Interviewee 3 states "Most of the time I'm not available to eat breakfast or lunch and so I mostly rely on the dinner part. Sometimes the food isn't ready and so I am not able to eat because there's just no food offered at that time". The student in interview 3 expressed how he would not be able to get any food during breakfast and lunch time and when he did attend dinner time there would be little to no options for dinner. In this interview, the student also explained that they would have night labs that usually ran from 6 pm to 9 pm which happens mostly during the dinner hours so then they would have to rely on late night. Because there is only one station open late at night creates for the dining hall to be overcrowded. Because of this student's schedule, they deprived their bodies until certain hours of the night and even then, sometimes the dining hall might not have many options, be closed, or be overcrowded.

In interview 4, another student was asked if they ever struggled with having time restraints based on when their next schedule was. The student answered, "Sometimes yes... it doesn't work very well with [my] schedule... so then I just may do with what [they] have in their dorm." Students have very busy schedules that sometimes get in the way of being able to get a complete meal at the dining hall or even cook so they must find whatever they have in their dorm and eat it. Most of the time, students only have snacks, or they might have communal

kitchens. However, a lot of the students being interviewed did mention that those communal kitchens are dirty or might not have the right supplies to cook.

Other students might not be as busy in school but do have to manage to have multiple jobs to be able to pay for any financial needs. This plays into when the students have a chance to eat because sometimes students go from class straight to work. This is evident with interviewee 2, who states "So right now, I currently have two jobs. I have worked two jobs my entire college career here at DU, which greatly affected my schedule and amount of...free time. I mean most of it was going towards things like tuition payments and helping my family and helping support myself".

This student mentioned how for the past two years she hasn't had meal swipes, so she had to rely on cooking. However, because as an energy she had a heavy load course causing her to be tired and not wanting to cook. In this same interview, she mentioned how she has had a financial constraint that sometimes holds her back from buying groceries to cook with. A senior in interview 10 stated, "I think it has to do with scheduling conflicts and not having the time or energy to cook my meals sometimes just based on where I'm at in the quarter."

Conclusion

Overall, the interviews conducted brought to light the significant impact that schedules have on access to food. Despite planning and trying to fit in a meal during the busy college student schedules, students still find themselves struggling to eat. The interviews showed the hardship of trying to balance school, homework, work, and meals especially when the dining hall hours might not fit into the schedules. When students do have the chance to head to the dining hall they do so when the dining hall might only have one station open, it is overcrowded, and it deprives students of all the possible nutrients. Additionally, some students have access to their kitchens, yet it goes back to the idea that some students sometimes don't have the time and energy to cook a full meal or even the time and money to grocery shop. This is just one of the many themes that emerged from the interviews conducted.

Access to Proper Nutrition

by: Sophie Bergan

Introduction

Access to proper nutrition at the University of Denver's dining hall can be a challenge for many students. In the midst of balancing course loads, studying, work, and college life, many students also find themselves struggling to find high quality and nutritionally balanced food on campus. While there is plenty of food available at the dining hall, many students note that it is difficult to comprise a plate of lean proteins, complex carbohydrates, and healthy fats, and that this leaves them feeling unenergized and unwell. Unfortunately, there are not many supplemental options on campus to make up for the lack of nutritional needs. With other options only ranging from Starbucks to Einsteins, many students find it difficult to access proper nutrition.

Throughout interviews with students living on and off campus, many outlined that it was difficult for them to have access to healthy food. One individual has lived both on and off campus and explains their experience with the DU Dining Hall by saying:

“Yeah. For the first two years living on campus, I utilized the dining hall. But I did notice that there wasn't a ton of healthy options As well as like I was eating a lot less than I usually would and so during like mid sophomore year I started pivoting to buying my own groceries and kind of meal prepping I think there I think if you really have the time you can find ways to create like healthy meals out of the dining hall by like going to different stations” [Interview 1].

Interestingly, this student explains that in order to create a healthy meal at the dining hall, it takes time and consideration to think about how to do that. Additionally, she makes it clear that a student would have to go to several different stations to make a meal healthy, which typically would involve multiple swipes. If every student did this to create a healthy meal, they would probably run out of swipes by the end of the quarter. Another student highlights this effort by saying:

“You have to actually put in effort to try to find...enough protein, get enough vegetables, get enough fruit, and get enough dairy in one meal.” [interviewee 6]

As students are trying to navigate classes, college life, and food quality, the help of a university employee when it comes to student nutrition could be a crucial component to success. While DU does employ a certified dietician, many students note that this resource is inaccessible and unreliable as shown in the quotes below.

“And although we do have a nutritionist, I think most people agree to the fact that it is extremely hard to get into contact with them, let alone be able to create a plan that is sufficient” [Interview 1]

“I had heard that if you have a meal plan you can talk to Sodexo's nutritionist... [but] they were awful... I essentially asked Sodexo what they can do for me for a month [for religious accommodations] and the answer I got was that there were too many restrictions and they would not be able to accommodate me.” [Interview 2].

With little success at the dining hall, the next best option is the DU Food Pantry. Unfortunately, when considering the DU Food Pantry, the options don't get much better. One student details options for students without a kitchen by explaining:

“Yeah, I think once I saw that there was, like Kraft Mac and cheese, like, microwavable things. But even then, that's not a healthy option for students. Like, it's a powder that you warm up in a styrofoam bowl. It's not a healthy option! Maybe as a snack, but even then, you're not getting the new nutritional demands your body is asking for” [Interview 2].

While the stereotypes of college students may lead people to believe that Kraft Mac and Cheese is a snack of choice, student interviewees prove otherwise, and show that there is a high demand for healthier options. This demand is especially high for active students who exercise regularly or play club sports. In the quote below, this is highlighted.

In reference to Club Sport athletes: “they need a lot of nutrients... or protein to be able to do their sport and that they don't feel like they can get a whole lot of that from here [the dining hall].” [interviewee 4]

Proper nutrition also doesn't just boil down to calories, protein and vegetables, however methods of cooking also contribute to how healthy a meal is. Whether a meal is cooked in olive oil or fried in peanut oil makes a huge difference to food quality. Students are noticing this at the dining hall:

“I do not think food is the healthiest option.... They fry a whole bunch of [food in] oil and then put oil on top of it later also.”

Conclusion

Access to proper nutrition can truly be the difference between a successful or an unsuccessful student. Unfortunately, the four quotes outlined above show that the University of Denver is not providing its students with the nutrition they need. Access to food is about so much more than just finding something to eat, but finding quality food to eat. Whether it's at the dining hall, the food pantry, or food options around campus students need access to nutritious food in a way that is convenient, affordable, and efficient.

Access to Resources & Food Insecurity

by: Charlie Bond

Introduction

Adequate access to resources is an aspect which, across the country, increases disparities in food security amongst vulnerable demographics. This is no exception on a college campus like the University of Denver where students are faced with an abundance of resources but a lack of support and education in regard to their options. Access to resources on a college campus can be as simple as having flexible hours and a reliable menu for the dining hall, or expand into larger systemic change, like incorporating healthier options across campus as a whole. For students, awareness about the resources on campus, as well as satisfaction with the resources on campus has greatly impacted the dining experience. Despite productivity and health depending on a good diet, being a student means sacrificing this because of time constraints, convenience, and desire. The following excerpts come from interviews in which these topics have been heavily discussed, beginning to answer the question of what DU as an organization can do to improve the state of food security in their students.

The first quote highlights a reoccurring comment from our interviewees regarding an important resource on campus, the dietician. A dietician provides important support and guidance to those struggling to build a nutritious diet themselves in a college setting, especially for those navigating dietary restrictions, allergies, and eating disorders. Despite having access to a dietician, a resource which is widely advertised across campus, many interviewees detail their personal difficulty in reaching the dietician at all.

“And I think it’s hard to navigate the dining hall when you’re struggling with something like that. [Eating disorders] And although we do have a nutritionist, I think most people agree to the fact that it is extremely hard to get into contact with them, let alone be able to create a plan that is sufficient in recovery of that disorder.”

The dependency of resources is brought into conversation again and again in regards to the hours at the dining hall. Previously, DU had two separate dining halls on either end of campus. Now there is one central dining hall with very limited hours and there is an attempt to bridge this gap with the dining hall being operational during a period typically between 9-10:30 pm. This is not always compatible with student schedules, especially students who are working jobs, it is a challenge when on campus job shifts often leave the employee unable to make it to the dining hall. The next quote is a commentary on the accessibility of the dining hall from a student who had on campus employment.

“... I would always get out of that shift at the call center super late and I would never make it to late night, like late night did not go late enough for me to make it at all. I think that is something that DU doesn’t really recognize, that sometimes students working desk shifts or other night shift jobs, or if they’re in late classes, that they’re not getting dinner. We were just not able to. I was eating cereal for, like dinner, if I even had cereal.”

Management of resources is another factor impacting the access level for students. Numerous dorms on campus that don’t provide a kitchen in each suite provide a communal kitchen. The management of these communal kitchens can at times be lacking, leaving the kitchens so messy that cooking becomes undesirable. There is also not a great way to manage the cooking utensils and food in the shared space, which impacts the experience when using it. The following quote reflects on the management of resources regarding a shared kitchen.

“So, you do have kitchen access, but the fact that it is communal impacts your use of it?”
“Yeah. And also because we’ve had issues with people stealing food and sometimes it’s dirty there and so it is not really a welcoming environment to be in.”

The DU Food pantry, a place students can drop off or take food items for free, is a student-run initiative hoping to be a beneficial resource in the daily lives of students. Despite being located in the community commons building, our interview responses reflected the lack of knowledge about this resource. A lack of advertisement or incorrect advertisement regarding food resources on campus can directly contribute to food insecurity. The following quote reflects the impact of this lack of awareness about resources.

“No, and I did not know that that was a thing. [The food pantry}. That could have benefitted me in my situation if I had known about it sooner. I, I’ve never seen anybody, like, advertise it, and I’ve never heard anybody talk about it. I don’t, I wouldn’t know, where that would be? Would it be in the community commons? Or is it the location somewhere else on campus? I just have never had someone mention it to me whether it be by email or when I’m passing by somewhere.”

Conclusion

Overall, despite having what appears to be adequate access to resources across campus, many students described barriers to these resources impacting their access to food and food security as a whole. While food insecurity is an intersectional issue with many influencing factors, resources that are well managed and accessible are highly important in contributing to a dependable, healthy diet.

Nutritional Variety Scarcity at DU

by: Jack Brooks

Introduction

One of the more pressing issues facing University of Denver students is a lack of access to nutritional foods. A balanced and healthy diet is not only a major relevant overall life need, but a large benefactor to being a successful student. Having a nutritional diet with a wide variety of foods helps to establish a healthy foundation to help students succeed. It is widely accepted that leading a healthy lifestyle helps in many areas of life. Whether it be from food health experts or even your average doctor, they would all agree that having proper nutrition in your day-to-day diet is highly important to overall health. However, according to students attending the University of Denver, they feel they do not have access to a variety of nutritional food options available on campus. Whether it be from the lack of actual food place options on campus, to what is actually served in certain places, many students expressed concern over the lack of nutritional variety for campus food.

The next quote highlights the difficulty of access to nutritious foods on campus. While there are nutritional options available, it can be hard for students to try and get all facets of the food pyramid to complete a well-rounded diet. "Um, uh, I would say that I, I do, especially at the dining hall, but it takes a, like, you actually have to put in effort to try to find, like, food to, like, Like, get enough protein, get enough vegetables, get enough fruit, and get enough dairy in one meal.". It becomes an arduous chore for some students to try and collect all the foods that would give them a well-rounded plate. This can be connected to another interview, which talks about the ease with which D1 athletes on campus can access nutritious diets "Like nutrients or like protein to be able to do their sport and that they don't feel like they can get a whole lot of that from here and that the food doesn't provide as much like oomph to it so that and I know a lot of like D1 athletes have like snacks and stuff provided to them that club athletes don't get so then they have to go about other ways to find those." While the university does have the ability to provide a proper variety of nutrition, it seems like it is only made easy to access for a few on campus.

This is further highlighted by another quote about building meals: "I think if you really have the time you can find ways to create like healthy meals out of the dining hall by like going to different stations."

The last quote I would like to highlight is talking about how the other dining options on campus, that are not the dining hall, aren't good alternatives to finding healthy food. " I do think that there are very limited healthy options If you've gone into the sea store, it's like mostly chips and candy and like a lot of microwavable meals that are like extremely carcinogenic if you eat too many of them, and so I think it's great for people who are working towards a means to an end...like there are a lot of kids... stay up late and want a quick snack at night. And I feel like they should have access to healthier options than microwavable meals."

Conclusion

There are many problems with the lack of nutritional variety at DU. The problems present themselves in many different forms. From some perspectives, there is a true lack of nutritional foods at all. For others, they feel as though trying to scrounge together all necessary food groups to create a balanced diet is an arduous task. Lastly, at the options that aren't the general dining hall, nutrition is lacking in those areas for the students that cannot eat at the dining hall.

Lack of Nutritional Value and Food Quality

by: Lukas Carmona

Introduction

High quality food is essential in providing someone good health. It is detrimental that people have access to quality food three times a day. The best way to prevent sickness or injury is to start with good meals consistently. Especially for college students, due to the amount of energy expended studying and in sports. Poor food quality can lead to poor physical and mental health which could affect a student's decision to remain in college. Calories are very important for our health and there are many kinds of calories and not all calories are the same, there are many differences in what makes a calorie "healthy". Food that counts as high quality is unrefined, low processed foods such as vegetables, fruits, healthy fats, whole grains and healthy protein. Lower quality foods are more commonly highly processed easy access snack foods such as beverages sweetened with sugar, refined sugar, fried foods, foods high in saturated fat and high glycemic index foods such as potatoes. From the interviews gathered in class it is a common trend that the dining hall has food that is low quality and not as nutritionally available as it could be.

This first quote reflects the challenges of the restricted availability of food during certain hours. At the dining hall when some stations are transitioning for the next mealtime there is one station that remains open, commonly burger. This is not a nutritional option for many students. "I feel like at DU like I go between thinking that the food is healthy and then I'm like, is it really? Because like definitely not the grill. And then sometimes 7 spoons is a bit greasier. Like this is definitely not helpful for me." The issue of excessive amounts of seed oils is also a problem that the DU dining hall faces; this student emphasizes this issue: "But I do know that they use seed oils and those are not healthy. So, I don't even know." Finding ways to access high quality food can be challenging and for some students at DU the food has also been making them feel ill: "Definitely, it'd probably be, like, cheap, low-quality food, because I'm very sensitive to that stuff, so it's not all, like, super ideal, so that half the time it makes me just not feel great because it's not high quality food." One student shared another personal experience: "For the first two years living on campus, I utilize the dining hall. But I did notice that there wasn't a ton of healthy options As well as like I was eating a lot less than I usually would and so during like mid sophomore year I started pivoting to buying my own groceries and kind of meal prepping I think there I think if you really have the time you can find ways to to create like healthy meals out of the dining hall by like going to different stations. But I don't necessarily think it's easily accessible."

Additionally, the lack of variety at the dining hall and the repetitive nature of options has contributed to dissatisfaction among students. Many students feel stuck with limited choices which leaves them resorting to less healthy alternatives due to a lack of convenience and better options. Another student elaborated on the struggle required to achieve a balanced diet: "like, you actually have to put in effort to try to find, like, food to, like, Like, get enough protein, get enough vegetables, get enough fruit, and get enough dairy in one meal." This quote further reinforces that the dining halls available options are fragmented, making students must seek out other components to meet their dietary needs. This intensive effort is a process that can be discouraging for students, especially those with busy schedules and this can lead to a suboptimal nutritional intake. This has led students to use options on campus such as Starbucks which is not a good supplemental option for nutrition. One student mentioned, "Sometimes I find myself, depending on my schedule for classes and things, like I'll have to stop and maybe do something like Starbucks or something like that. That maybe isn't necessarily the worst thing for

you, but it's not necessarily a full meal or something you should do like every day of the week." This reliance that students have on convenient but nutritionally unavailable options highlights the challenges students must face in accessing a healthy balanced meal. The frequent need for some students to resort to quick fixes such as Starbuck, C-store or Einstein's calls attention to the dining hall's failure in being able to provide accessible, nutritious options that fit well into most students' busy schedules.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the constant issue of food and nutritional quality at the DU dining hall is a great concern for many students. The limited availability and accessibility of healthy options, the excessive use of seed oils and the repetitive nature of the meals and scheduling contribute to the dissatisfaction and health issue among students at DU. The difficulty of finding a healthy balanced meal has pushed students toward fewer nutritional alternatives, which is completely unsustainable for their physical and mental health. Making sure that DU provides a variety of high quality and nutritious food is critical in supporting the success and health of students across campus. If these issues are addressed it can potentially lead to a better dining experience, better health outcomes and possibly higher retention rates as students feel more supported in their nutritional needs.

Food Quality at the University of Denver

by: Maya Crouvi

Introduction

Whether that is the attention to detail while presenting the food, the actual companies and providers that the dining hall uses, or individual attainment to good quality food, students on DU's campus have something to say. Rather than focusing on nutrition, even if there is something for students to eat that they feel is healthy for them, it could be filled with different inflammatory oils, cheap providers, ultra-processed foods, or even unwashed items. Many interviewees mentioned that even when eating healthy, they still don't feel good after eating in the dining hall. This is a necessary and alarming concern throughout our interviews because it leaves students helpless, since even if you think you are going for the healthiest options, the ingredients the meal is made with are harmful. Students also feel they are paying too much for the cheap foods they get in return. The quality of the food is one of the most frequent themes that is brought up in the interviews, encompassing how large of an issue this is for students, especially those with more sensitive stomachs, but even those who don't feel sick, there could be potential dangers in the future continuing on this diet. Here is what a handful of students have had to say concerning this topic.

In the second interview, the interviewee talks about how even when they try to be healthy and get a salad, the dining hall won't allow them to do so. She recalls a time when attention to detail was lacking, resulting in her never attempting to eat at salad again:

"But that being said, I don't think they washed the veggies at Greens because sophomore year there were spiders in my salads, in my spinach, multiple times. I could not- I have not eaten Greens ever since."

Spiders in the spinach weren't the only thing students noticed that turned them off from eating in the dining hall resulting in the quality of their food. Interview #11 also seemed to have issues regarding the quality of the food, making it unappealing to go to the dining hall. "And then it just kind of like got worse. Um, like in quality, like it just like Like, I don't know, it's not like enjoyable there anymore. And like, the, like, like the green station, that definitely went down in quality too."

In regard to different years and how the dining hall has improved or not, Interviewee #6 had a different perspective on how the quality of the food has improved but refers to a time when it was again, lacking quality and unappealing to students. This is evident in the statement "Yeah, they improved the quality of the food. I remember when you would go to stir fry, and the containers of meat were like, full of blood, and now they are not."

Aside from the actual look of the food that is presented at the dining hall, showcasing the quality, students also believe that the ingredients that are used can be harmful. In interview #7, the Interviewee goes on to describe how their meals have been, stating "So the dining hall is all super super fatty and I think that comes with poor quality ingredients and there is not concern. About health for the calories cause of them are high-calorie, dense, and high-fat content."

Health concerns regarding the quality of the food are on students' minds. Interviewee #4 goes on to describe their experience on how they have assessed the quality of the food provided to them and how it has affected them personally. Interviewee #4 states "Definitely, it'd probably be, like, cheap, low-quality food, because I'm very sensitive to that stuff, so it's not all, like, super ideal so that half the time it makes me just not feel great because it's not high-quality food."

Not feeling great after eating dining hall food because of its quality, students aren't encouraged to go eat at the dining hall because they are scared of the results that they will see. In interview #13, this is shown as well in their statement

"Actually, yes. I remember at the beginning of the year after almost every meal I used to get stomach aches. I was probably just adjusting, but, like that doesn't seem normal I think. That's why I always say don't let me get a burger or pizza to eat, so probably that quality has good potential to like, improve, I guess."

If healthy and good-quality ingredients aren't used, this is portrayed in the student's health; that is why this theme is so important to discuss, as it directly affects our student body. Interviewee #14 was a great example of how one could be hurt by the quality of the food. Interviewee #14 states "I think every year except for this I've gotten food poisoning from like undercooked meat like stir fry so I'm still a little bit hesitant to eat stir fry and a bunch of my friends agree"

Conclusion

Referring to the interviews that were used to describe the theme of food quality at DU, we have gathered enough information and concern throughout the student body that there is a problem. Students feel as if it is either harmful for them to eat at the dining hall or just unappealing. Both of these options lead back to the importance of quality in the food we choose to consume. When at a university, it is hard when there are only limited places where you can receive food, but the dining hall being the main place in all of these quotes that have resulted in having poor-quality food, it is something that is on students' minds.

Social Stigma and Awareness as Determining Factors of Access for the DU Food Pantry

by: Caroline Daley

Introduction

Public and private universities alike are often composed of highly diverse populations, providing a microcosm to which social epidemiologists can study the influences of an environment where social, academic, professional, and personal needs are deeply intertwined. The last decade has witnessed an increase in awareness and research regarding the prevalence of food insecurity within such populations. Traditionally, food insecurity is defined as the inability to maintain or obtain a nutritional diet sufficient in both quantity and quality in socially acceptable ways, as well as the uncertainty around the ability to do so. Low-income levels and inadequate housing options are commonly cited as the primary driving factors of food insecurity across the U.S. However, continued research has led social scientists to identify auxiliary determinants that are especially pertinent to college students, namely time-limitations, commuting and transportation needs, and social stigma—factors often overlooked in current assessments. Through a collection of interview excerpts, this analysis aims to shed light on the prevailing attitudes and barriers related to accessing the DU food pantry, highlighting the mutual effects of stigma and awareness on student utilization of these resources.

Hierarchy of Needs

This interviewee highlights a potential social stigma for students facing food insecurity specific to DU, where many students come from affluent backgrounds. They suggest it might be uncomfortable to seek help from fellow students, some of whom may be financially secure themselves, for basic necessities. Additionally, the quote suggests that some students hesitate to use the food pantry out of a personal belief that others need it more, suggesting this perception of need can be a barrier to accessing resources.

“I don't know any of my residents who've utilized the food pantry. Honestly, I was thinking about this. The food pantry is run by students, and so like, I thankfully could go to the food pantry and benefit from it, but I never have come to like a dire position in my life where I'm like, I really need to access that. But I know that there are kids on campus who are at that position, and I just wonder how comfortable they may feel interacting with other students because it's like an admission of vulnerability and it's an admitted admission of like low income and that especially going to a school like DU is a difficult thing to come to terms with.”

The perception that other students are in greater need—and the hierarchy of needs thereby disqualifies them from support services—was reiterated by other student interviewees. This theme suggests a sense of uncertainty around who is qualified to use the pantry.

“Cuz like I don't really know who's supposed to use it. And like I don't want to go in there and take food from people who need it more than I do.”

A student who was aware of the food pantry expressed a similar process of self-establishing “need”, which indicates a subjective understanding of food insecurity among the student body.

“I did know, but I just never felt the need to use it.”

This excerpt likewise reflects the consensus that the pantry is only for those unable to purchase any food, not those who might need to supplement their existing resources.

“I guess because in my mind the food pantry is for people who can't buy their own food. And like, I have access to like, the dining hall, but also like, I am able to buy my own food from like, the grocery store, so I think that's the reason that I like, refrain from using it.”

This quote exemplifies both the theme of "need" and the social stigma surrounding the food pantry. The interviewee expresses hesitation due to the perceived limited supplies, suggesting a belief that using the pantry would take away from those in greater need. Additionally, the mention of not having close friends who use the pantry hints at a potential social stigma. Feeling "weird" about going alone suggests a discomfort associated with utilizing the resource.

“Yeah, I don't know. I always hear about college food pantries having limited supplies. So. I always felt like I should leave it for the people who really need it. I don't know. Also, I don't have any close friends that use it. I feel weird going there alone.”

General Awareness of the Food Pantry

Beyond the self-disqualification based on perceived need, some interviewees, when asked about food pantry use, revealed a lack of awareness. This included not knowing the pantry's location or even its existence.

A few interviewees learned of the food pantry's existence during the interview:

“I didn't even know the school had one.”

“I have not. I honestly didn't know we had that.”

One interviewee, previously unaware of the pantry, expressed that earlier knowledge would have been beneficial to their situation, indicating that a lack of awareness may act as a barrier for students who need additional support.

“No, and I did not know that that was a thing. That could have benefited me in my situation if I had known about it sooner.”

Other interviewees had heard of the pantry, but were unaware of the location:

“I've never seen anybody, like, advertise it, and I've never heard anybody talk about it. I don't, I wouldn't know, where that would be? Would it be in the community commons? Or is the location somewhere else on campus?”

Some responses reveal the obscured location of the pantry may influence knowledge and awareness:

“No, I didn't even know that was the thing until you pointed it out like junior year, because I don't go downstairs.”

Some interviewees expressed a vague understanding of the pantry, indicating a lack of clarity in which food pantry information is disseminating on campus.

“Um, I'm gonna be honest, I really don't. I've heard like a few people mention it randomly, but I really know nothing about it. I've never really received any information about it.”

This excerpt recounts an instance where job training for the interviewee presented the pantry as a resource for others, not for the trainees themselves. This anecdote exemplifies how in some cases, awareness about the pantry doesn't consistently come from the university but rather trickles down through student networks.

“I was never told about the food pantry as a student of DU, I guess only as an employee. Yeah it was like these are their resources--I only heard about it as a part of the job to then offer it to students. So even those freshmen weren't even getting it offered to them by the school, it was coming from their RA.”

Conclusion

This analysis reveals several contributing factors driving usage trends of the campus food pantry. Firstly, students often grapple with a subjective definition of "need." They might believe the pantry is reserved for dire situations, leading them to feel food secure even when struggling to afford consistent meals. This perception creates a self-imposed barrier, where students prioritize the needs of others and potentially disqualify themselves. Secondly, some students simply lack awareness of the pantry's existence or location. Without this knowledge, they can't consider it as a potential resource, regardless of their actual need. Finally, the student-run nature of the pantry, coupled with the self-determined need factor, might contribute to a sense of stigma. Shame associated with admitting a personal need for food, or the fear of taking resources from others perceived as "more in need," could further discourage utilization. These factors combine to create a situation where students who could benefit from the pantry's support might not access it due to a mix of perception, lack of information, and potential social discomfort.

The Lack of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables at the C-Store and the Dining Hall

by: Luke Dunn

Introduction

Many students talk about problems with the food at the University of Denver, from the lack of variety to the lackluster attempts to reduce food insecurity. One of these major problems that keeps coming up in each interview is the amount of, or lack thereof, fresh fruit and vegetables available in the dining hall and food stores all across campus. The dining hall provides fruit bowls in several different stations, but these do not change from day-to-day, so they get old fast. They do not provide many vegetable options outside of the salad station, and even that requires a meal swipe to gain access to. The C-stores are not much better, having a small selection of fresh fruit and overcharging for each individual one. This is a serious problem on campus, as it shows that many students are not able to get the healthy food that they need unless they spend their own money driving to a grocery store and picking up food of their own. This is unacceptable, as students already pay far too much money to study here for them to be malnourished.

In the second interview, the interviewee talked about how her only sources of fresh fruits and vegetables were from her personal shopping or from the food pantry here on campus in their quote “I was getting a lot of like canned fruits and vegetables and I at that point had no idea the food pantry even existed”. She does say that the stir fry station in the dining hall allows for some vegetable options, but many students do not trust this station, as many people have gotten food poisoning and will sometimes find pieces of other people’s meals in their own, especially according to the interviewee from the third interview when they said, “I sure as hell don’t trust stir fry because people have gotten food poisoning from there”. Even people who have adequate access to healthy foods need to go to external stores to get their fruits and vegetables, such as the 14th interviewee who goes to Safeway to do her shopping.

Many students don’t even eat at the dining hall often, as many of them are sick of the food as there is not much variety after you have been to all the stations. According to the 6th interviewee, they need to work hard to get the necessary nutrients they need, as shown in their quote “you actually have to put in effort to try to find, like, food to, like, Like, get enough protein, get enough vegetables, get enough fruit, and get enough dairy in one meal.” Several students have stopped eating at the dining hall as a result, even this student, who has resorted to relying on Starbucks to get their meals, which certainly does not have the fruits and vegetables a growing student needs. We see a similar thing happening with the other shops on campus, with people relying on places like Einsteins Bagels simply because they are sick of the dining hall and their lack of variety. This has been leading to many students not getting the nutrients they need. This is a major problem, as lack of access to healthy food can cause imbalances in students’ bodies, leading to sickness and health problems, especially over a long period of time. This is bad, but what can DU do to fix this? The little fruit bowls in the dining hall currently are a decent solution, but they are not offered at every station and are the same

variety every day, so it gets old pretty quick. A solution could be to start offering fruit and vegetable options at every station and rotating out their options every day to cut down on staleness. Another major problem is the C-store and their lack of variety when it comes to fresh foods. They do sell apples and bananas, but they are so expensive that students don't buy them simply to save money. While talking about the C-stores in the 7th interview, the interviewee said "I think that is way too much and also, I think your meal plan cache should just be used by default in the C store. I think it's kind of stupid. You have to pay it while you're already here paying for everything else. And also, they make it, incredibly expensive."

Conclusion

As students, we should be bringing awareness to this problem, as it is harming us all protein, get enough vegetables, get enough fruit, and get enough dairy in one meal." Several students have stopped eating at the dining hall as a result, even this student, who has resorted to relying on Starbucks to get their meals, which certainly does not have the fruits and vegetables a growing student needs. We see a similar thing happening with the other shops on campus, with people relying on places like Einsteins Bagels simply because they are sick of the dining hall and their lack of variety. This has been leading to many students not getting the nutrients they need.

How DU Dining Perpetuates Food Insecurity for Students with Dietary Restrictions

by: Camryn Evans

Introduction

There is a population of students at the University of Denver with dietary restrictions that they must keep in mind as they navigate the eating scene on campus. For these students, securing a safe meal requires more thought and is more consequential than it generally is for those without dietary restrictions. One would expect, then, that DU would employ special measures to thoroughly accommodate its students with unique dietary needs (much like how it institutes more forgiving academic policies for student-athletes who experience unique scheduling limitations). Unfortunately, though, being thoroughly accommodated at DU is not an experience that all students with dietary restrictions can say they share.

The Nexus Between Dietary Restrictions and Food Insecurity at DU

Many students have to use certain resources to help them confirm whether the food provided in the dining hall is safe for them to eat. One of these resources is the Pure and Simple dining station with its advertised clean ingredients free from many major allergens. However, just because the resource exists does not necessarily mean that the food it offers is of good quality or that it provides enough variety to satisfy a range of preferences. One DU student says:

“...[T]hey only have one station that technically does [accommodate allergies]. And then that’s no good.”

This student alludes to the fact that Pure and Simple is only one of eight food stations in the dining hall, leaving those with certain allergies only one possible choice for each meal of the day. It is problematic then, that Pure and Simple, as highlighted above, can sometimes be lacking in quality or taste, in which case many students with allergies are left to either consume a safe but unpleasant meal, pick up something tastier from another station but risk exposure to their allergen(s), or simply go hungry.

Another dining hall resource to help students confirm whether they can eat certain foods are Sodexo’s displayed food labels. One DU student says:

“I have a shellfish and nut allergy. That’s why...I’ll just read the thing [that says] ‘contains this’ and I’ll just be like, ‘Okay, if it says it contains shellfish or something, I’ll avoid it.’”

Evidently, food labels are commonly utilized as a safety resource in the dining hall, which makes it problematic that these very labels do not always provide accurate information. One individual recognizes this issue when they say:

“I know there are people who can’t eat certain things, but then they’re like, ‘I don’t know what this is or what it was cooked in and I’m not willing to try it.’ Whereas if they had actual signs out or if the app actually worked better about what it was, what kind of oil it was cooked in or what it was cooked with or anything like that would be helpful for a lot of people. ...I try and use [the Sodexo app], but it doesn’t work because half the time the hours are wrong, the meals never work, the ingredients don’t actually ever tell you anything.”

Given the problems identified with the Pure and Simple offerings as well as Sodexo's displayed food labels, one would hope that at least the nutritionist from whom students are supposedly able to receive guidance in developing accommodation plans would prove beneficial. Unfortunately, though, students, such as the following DU Resident Assistant, have identified the nutritionist resource to be ineffective as well.

"I have residents who are Celiac who don't have access to a proper nutritionist at DU's dining hall. Therefore, they are responsible for providing their own food, getting pots and pans, and navigating the whole dorm system. ...And although we do have a nutritionist, I think most people would agree to the fact that it is extremely hard to get into contact with them."

DU's inadequate employment of helpful nutritionists not only affects students whose dietary restrictions are medical as described above, but also those with dietary restrictions due to religious holidays or other cultural customs. Regarding their experience during a religious holiday they observe, one student says:

"...[O]ur dietary restrictions are very limited for this period, these 40 days. And I had heard that if you have a meal plan, you can talk to Sodexo's nutritionist, which I heard they no longer work here, thank goodness, because they were awful...I said 'anything that is boiled or dressed with lemon or vinegar, can we do something like that?'...and the kind of answer I got was that there were too many restrictions that I was giving them and they would not be able to accommodate me."

This experience reveals the dismissive attitude that DU students have encountered when simply trying to ensure that they will be able to find a meal — and in this particular student's experience, find meals for an extended period of forty days. When this same individual moved into an apartment with kitchen access, their experience around food security during religious holidays drastically changed. They note:

"And that [apartment] is where I was able to take better control of my dietary restrictions. If I was fasting for Orthodox Easter or anything like that, I was able to accommodate that."

With the problems outlined above, one would hope that DU would at least readily allow for those with dietary restrictions to reject the meal plan so that they can use that money to procure their own food instead. This is not the case though, as recognized by the following DU student:

"I do know that a lot of people here...struggle a lot with getting you to accommodate them. And then they don't let them be released at the meal plan. They have to fight tooth and nail to be like...'It's not just me being on a diet. I literally am allergic to it and you don't serve anything that has no cross contamination."

Evidently, DU makes it exceedingly difficult for students with dietary restrictions not only to find safe meals, but also to pursue the solution of forgoing this unaccommodating meal plan. When asked whether they have access to proper food allergy accommodations, one DU student said:

"Yeah, the grocery store tends to have options that meet my needs."

Without an easy way out of DU's meal plan options, certain students have to allocate funds to procure their own food and cooking equipment from entities outside of DU despite also being

required (if they are a first- or second-year student) to purchase an expensive meal plan through the school. This unfortunate reality is exemplified by the RA's residents with Celiac disease as well as the above student who identifies the grocery store rather than DU's own dining hall as the resource that meets their dietary needs.

Conclusion

DU perpetuates food insecurity for those with dietary restrictions not only by providing one single and often unsatisfactory food option, ingredient information that is inaccurate, and a nutritionist that is unhelpful, but also by forcing the majority of these students to purchase a meal plan that they cannot properly utilize, requiring them to either go hungry or spend essentially twice the amount of money on food than other students generally have to. It is my firm belief that DU must rectify its unsympathetic lack of regard for students with dietary restrictions in the following ways: by employing and training thoroughly (especially to be receptive and proactive) more nutritionists, by ensuring that the information displayed on food labels in the dining hall is accurate and complete, and by making it easier for students with proven dietary restrictions to opt out of the meal plan. DU must begin taking seriously the nutritional health of all its students — no matter the measures required to do so.

Time Restraints and Accessibility to Food

by: Katie Flagel

Introduction

Here at DU, there have been struggles for most to get food when they want and how they want. This accruing theme was found through interviews done over weeks 5-8 of Spring Quarter 2024. Most of the time these concerns and complaints came about from accessibility to when to get food, and how to get food late at night. Having time restraints or scheduling issues becomes a major problem for students especially when school is being prioritized over meals. Many students eat later after labs and after sports, however, nothing is available to eat that is freshly cooked. In the middle of the night there is nothing available either for the students who study later or are just up later.

The first quote expresses the frustration with how the dining hall hours do not work for them. Having to spend time thinking about where food will come from and if a certain schedule works to get them food throughout the day. Not being able to just easily know when a student will be able to get food can have a greater affect than having to think about when a person wants to eat. This becomes an issue of not when a person wants to eat but when it works best for the dining hall and a student's schedule.

“In those kinds of things—access to open dining halls with healthy food—it’s like, really hard. For so many ways—I feel like I’ve wasted so much time working around their weird hours or options, just like, yeah, too much time spent worried about that. I think that’s the biggest thing DU needs to change, that being their relationship with Sodexo to become more student focused.”

Not being able to find time because of classes is shown by this quote from interview 4. This quote also allows insight into how many students are unable to eat when they want and must eat when they can. “Sometimes it’s because the way my class is, like if I have class that ends at two and then I come to the dining hall, like nothing is open.”

The next quote explains how not just class schedules affect eating but also working at an on-campus job can affect how and when a student is eating. This student talks about how working night hours on campus does not allow for appropriate eating times that don’t leave them hungry by the end of the night. Working at night without campus provided food or a source of food is also shown, there is no money given for the workers to buy food or snacks provided when working long shifts when everything is closed.

“I do personally, yes, because of my work hours. Because I’ll eat at like 6 or 7, but my shift doesn’t start until 9 o’clock at night. So, there’s not a whole lot at that point. But then, when I’m working all night, everything is closed. And like even like the commons is all locked and all that stuff and the c store is locked so if we get food, we have to go somewhere else and spend our own money we can’t like come in to anything on campus to grab good while we’re working on campus”

Also from interview 4, this student expresses a need for something to truly be open 24/7 that allows students to eat when they want. This student expresses how many students stay up late and normally get hungry being up for so long and how there is nothing open after midnight.

“Probably something like the c store that would actually be open like 24/7 because I know like a lot of people like to get meals or things like if they’re sick at the c store but it not being open after 10 [open after 12] o’clock at night sometimes is difficult for people who like want a snack at like one if they’re studying or something like that.”

In interview 15, this student talks about how having a 24-hour food source would be a better way to help students. Like what interview 4 said about how nothing is open all the time which limits access to foods when studying and when working. “I feel like Du could have a 24-hour restaurant open that I could use meal swipes at.”

From this interview, the student draws a comparison between other colleges and DU. They explain how DU has limiting hours that end up being so specific which doesn’t allow them to eat when they want. Their quote also allows for solution of having the dining hours open all day rather than the scheduled eating times. “I mean, so many other schools are open, like, the full day, just like straight through. Like, I don’t understand why DU doesn’t do that. Like, why it’s like such, like, limited hours, like, so specific.”

The final quote talks about the need to finish assignments before doing other things including eating. The student also expresses how after doing the other activities there is no time to eat or get food because the dining hours are already over. They also talk about how even during the time of the day when they aren’t working a lot, they are still only available when the dining hall is changing from lunch to dinner or breakfast to lunch.

“Yeah, like especially when I have classes a lot in the afternoon, um, and if I have, because sometimes I feel like I have to do my homework in order to do other things, and by the time I’m done with like my classes, extracurriculars, and my homework, um, dinner time is already over, or lunchtime has passes, and the times that I have free time, like during, during the day, it’s during the transition periods.”

Conclusion

From the gathered evidence from interviews, it is seen that many students are struggling to have time to get food when they would like. These students have different accounts and understandings of their own eating habits but each of them showing that because there are not dining options 24/7 or that the dining hall hours are so limiting they are unable to eat when their schedules allow for it. In my opinion this doesn’t allow healthy eating habits and puts students in positions to sacrifice one thing for another, whether that be eating for doing an activity or schoolwork, or vice versa. Not allowing students easy and anytime access to food can be seen to create food insecurity for most students which then intern can affect how they do academically or even socially. Many students offered some solution from what they had comments about. Some of these being, 24-hour open food service, and all-day open dining hall with no specific transition hours. Many students seem to be in a position of not having easy and simple access to food based around time constraints and scheduling challenges.

Reliability Pertaining to the DU Dining Hall

by: Kelli Guedry

Introduction

In our study of on-campus upperclassmen, we found that many of them rely on the dining hall as their primary food source. However, many students find the dining hall to have unreliable hours, hours that conflict with most student schedules, limited options for mealtimes and especially for late-night eating, and an inaccurate app. These are the biggest logistical hurdles when it comes to the reliability of the dining hall. In the following paragraphs, I will document the concerns of specific students surrounding the theme of reliability, specifically when it comes to time constraints and accessibility.

Often, students find themselves skipping meals because they cannot reliably make it to 3, or even 2, of the available meal times provided by the dining hall. Students may find themselves eating only once per day. The following quote from interview #12 highlights this issue:

“I do find myself sometimes like, depending on what schedule I have that quarter, um, like sometimes I'm just stressed or strapped for time, or I didn't have time to plan out my meals, and so, you know. Usually I can figure it out, but there are some days sometimes where I, um, either like skip a meal or don't eat the best just cause I'm trying to get through the day and just get to the next one and figure out, and then I'll figure out something better to do next time...I find my schedule to be pretty packed a lot of the time. So, I mean half the time it's like I won't have time to make a time and go across campus to grab something or I just don't have time in the terms of like I'm powering through and studying or I have homework to do that I need to get done and so I'll willingly choose to just not eat lunch or skip a breakfast here and there because maybe I didn't plan well enough or things like that.”

Scheduling conflicts between students' schedules and the available mealtimes can cause them significant stress. They must also factor in the time it takes to walk to the dining hall. 15 minutes can make a lot of difference in a student's day, so a 30-minute round-trip to the dining hall and back can take away valuable study time, class time, and energy. Students are already stressed due to their workloads, but stressing about food can cause additional problems and lead to poor performance or poor health. The following student from interview #10 finds themselves so stressed, they have trouble eating:

“I believe stress makes me, um, not really want to eat sometimes, so I don't feel hungry. So when I'm stressed sometimes, I just forget to eat... I could literally eat so much my first year and I don't know what happened, but my appetite's gone like very much down my junior and senior year, it might be stress-related. Cause I used to eat maybe like three or four times a day, um, freshmen and sophomore year, but now I just eat like maybe once or twice a day. Stress is definitely something that stops me from like, um, being able to like eat a meal comfortably. Um, like if I'm so stressed, I just want to focus on my assignments instead of, um, how starving I am, I guess.”

Sometimes students are faced with the decision of either skipping class or skipping a meal, or skipping an assignment or skipping a meal, etc. A student may become so stressed out trying to figure out what to eat, when to eat, and how much time they have to eat, that they find it easier not to eat anything at all. These are incredibly difficult choices that when given, usually a

student will choose to attend class hungry knowing they are missing mealtimes. An example is given in the following quote from interview #11:

“Um, I am in class, like, straight through lunch the whole time, like, every day. And so, like, I, then, like, if I want to go to the dining hall, like, after class, there's just, like, nothing. Like, nothing is open. Um, and, like, sometimes they'll say that things are supposed to be open, and they're just not.”

It is a heartbreaking dose of reality for students who make their way to the dining hall anticipating a hot meal, and upon approval, see that every station is closed, especially when the Sodexo app told them there was food available. The unreliability of the app puts students in precarious and disappointing situations when it is not accurate. Interviewee #4 states:

“I try and use [the app], but it doesn't work, because half the time the hours are wrong, the meals never work, the ingredients, like, don't actually ever tell you anything... half the time it's wrong, so then I just haven't gotten to the point where I don't bother. But it would be really nice to have something that I can just look at my phone to see the options that are here like what's open and what is available at those places that are open.”

The dining hall is also an unreliable food source due to dangerous weather conditions. Students that live in residences that are at least a 15-minute walk from the dining hall will often, in the wintertime, not bother to make the trek through the snow for a bite to eat. This leaves them with the option of not eating or utilizing their limited financial resources to eat out. Interviewee #9 asserts:

“Some days, especially winter quarter, when it's cold the last thing I want to do is go to the dining hall. So, I order food. It's so expensive, I need to stop.”

Students find it quite limiting when there is only one dining hall on campus and its distance from residence to residence varies greatly. When faced with the option of hiking through snow to make it to the dining hall, students would rather stay home. Furthermore, when the weather is better, the lack of dining hall availability during transition periods, such as 2pm-3pm seems to be a missed opportunity. Block periods, such as 12pm-2pm, are when students are usually in class, and therefore, cannot access food even though it is ready. Interviewee #6 states:

“...Especially when I have classes a lot in the afternoon, um, And if I have, because sometimes I feel like I have to do my homework in order to do other things, and by the time I'm done with like my classes, extracurriculars, and my homework, um, dinner time is already over, or lunchtime has passed, and the times that I have free time, like during, during the day, it's during the transition periods. So sometimes I go to the dining hall and there's just nothing open.”

The lack of late-night weekend options requires students to stick to a rigid schedule, plan their classes around the dining hall's schedule, or opt for take-out which they cannot afford. This is a very difficult schedule to sustain. Even with a meal plan, many students still go to bed hungry. A student from interview #9 recounts a startling experience of a night where they went to bed hungry:

“Especially with the dining hall, the hours are so weird. Like on days like Fridays and Sundays. There's been many times where I miss dinner and I'm hungry. Then on those

days there's no late dinner. I remember a time in sophomore year, I had no money in my account left. Like my personal debit card. And, I missed dinner on a Sunday. I literally had no option. Like, there was no way I could eat, unless I had some of my roommate's snacks. That's crazy to me."

On weeknights, there are some late-night options, but students are confused as to why there cannot just be an adequate dinner period instead of odd meal times and confusing options:

"Late night kind of solves the dinner issue, but like, it doesn't have it on weekends too. And also like late night doesn't really give variety. Yeah, it's only one option and it's usually unhealthy. So I think that it could change. Like I feel like dining hall hours would be better like 5:30 to 8:30 or something like that. I mean, I know that that's a lot to like ask of like shifts and like for the actual people who are staff in the dining hall, but I think for students it'd probably be better."

Conclusion

Overall, students find the dining hall to be a source of stress and an inadequate resource as it stands now. The dining hall needs expanded times and transportation options, or even the construction of more dining halls, to keep up with student demand. No student should face the reality of going to bed hungry, especially when they are paying for a meal plan. These quotes document that students are dissatisfied with the reliability of the dining hall, and it makes them face food insecurity. Food is available, but students still struggle to get it

Recommendations

DU students have some great ideas as to how to improve the dining hall's hours and accessibility problems. These solutions include better maintenance of the Sodexo app, mealtimes extending later instead of beginning earlier, and aligning the dining hall schedule with actual practical student mealtime availability. If the dining hall could recognize what times students are actually attending classes, they could have food available in more of those transitional periods, such as times like 2pm-3pm. Students believe that the time it takes to prepare the food leads to these rigid requirements; however, students would love low-effort grab-and-go options that would resolve the problem of the dining hall needing hours of cooking time to have food ready. Furthermore, especially in the winter months, students find it difficult to make the trek all the way to the dining hall through sleet and snow. If there were a transportation option that could reliably and consistently commute students to the dining hall, this would be a large improvement in the issue of transportation when it comes to on-campus students wishing to access the dining hall.

Lack of Variety in Food Options on DU's Campus

by: Kaila Hendershot

Introduction

The theme of a lack of variety at The University of Denver is a nuanced exploration of the homogeneity that can sometimes impact the student significantly. The shortage of meal diversification on the campus itself could have a significant impact on student's health and academic outcomes. This is a reality because when students are restricted in their choices of foods that they are able to consume, they are normally denied proper nutrition. The lack of good nutrition that comes with a monotonous diet can have adverse effects on the body including affecting the physical health and cognitive abilities of the body and energy level as well. For example, consuming unhealthy food from childhood and adolescence such as food high in saturated fats, processed foods, and red meat can lead to a deficiency in vitamins and minerals, including vitamin C, iron, and omega-3 fatty acids that are associated with focus, memory, and immune strength. As such, the students may be more prone to catching diseases or feeling tired, which will in turn impact their ability to attend classes, undertake extracurricular activities, and even be productive in their studies. Also, it is necessary to understand that the psychological aspect of monotonous diets is also very important. Food is not only a necessary nutrient but it is also a necessity to satisfy people's desire for comfort. This can cause food monotony and in the long instead of perking up with the anticipation of eating good food, it becomes just another chore one has to go through. This can reduce morale among students and lead to dissatisfaction among members of the campus community. The daily consumption of limited food options also means that students will end up developing a desire for junk foods and fast foods in order to break the boredom, practically leading to wastage and increased cases of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease among others.

In addition, the availability of different foods is not very rich, and they can pose a problem for foreign students and those who have certain dietary preferences. Food is a very important way through which learners from other countries are able to feel connected to the cultural background that they come from especially when they are in a different country that they have to learn and adapt to. Due to the differences in the food eaten back at home and food available in the college, the students may experience higher levels of homesickness and isolation, thus contributing to the challenges often faced in transition to college life. Also, students who have special diets because of their allergies, intolerances, or because of their beliefs or preferences like vegan, or halal diets may face difficulties in finding food, thus they will have inadequate nutrition and extra stress.

From the economic aspect, it is also essential to consider that the lack of differentiation in campus food can also affect a student's pocket. In this case, limited options might force the students into spending more at off-campus restaurants or even ordering high-priced food delivery services to get a variety of meals. This can be an issue to their pockets, especially for those operating under small cash, or little capital. Moreover, the time that is taken in order to look for better nutrition also reduces the amount of time that can be used in studying or other productive activities thus poor performance.

The social effects of having few food options to choose from also have great consequences on the campus. Cafeterias and other dining services are essential for the student's social experience as people communicate, become friends, and create communities in such places. Lack of good and varied food choices can make these social spaces less inviting to patrons and

thus, there will be little to no communal dinners held and the overall campus can become a divided one. This can be a sad affair since students will be forced to eat alone or else take food from other places that are not within the campus environment hence they can miss out on great opportunities of interacting with fellow students or even the faculty in a more informal way.

It is not just about the provision of better meals to address the issue of the limited food options available on campus but a chance to create a healthier, more diverse, and more engaging campus culture. As for the choice, universities should focus on creating a vast range of healthy meals that would correspond to the different cultures represented in the schools. This can include alignment with local food providers, feeding the students' ideas into the menu, and making sure that catering services address diverse food options. It can also help improve students' health, welfare, and grades, as well as increase cultural awareness and tolerance within the school.

A focus on the quality and variety of the campus dining offerings can be positively beneficial in several ways. It has been observed that when students are healthy they are more productive in class since they are not fatigued, therefore they are better positioned to make good grades. The students could also gain satisfying and tasty meals which let them feel happy and could help to decrease their stress and make them more satisfied with life on campus. In addition, providing for different diets can help to diversify the campus environment to become more friendly to various students such as international students and those who have special diets. Consequently, this may enhance the number of students who remain enrolled and succeed at a university, in addition to the university's image in the eyes of students as a flexible and attentive institution.

The following quote from Interviewee 3 shows the lack of variety of food on campus through criticism of the limited dining options and restriction of the diversity of food available:

"I think they should have more dining spaces across campus because I feel like forcing all students to go to one dining hall for every meal is kind of a stupid idea."

Interviewee 4 demonstrates the clear need for more diverse and healthier sources around campus food areas:

"More variety of food that's not all greasy food."

Interviewee 6 expresses a personal preference of the university not meeting a variety of culinary preferences through the statement "...Especially when the dining hall doesn't have the food I like", supporting the theme of a lack of variety.

Interviewee 7 highlights the inadequacies and expresses the need for more diverse and scheduled food options through the following statement:

"It would be a. Good idea to have each place in the dining hall open a different late night of week like it could be seven on Monday. So fried Tuesday. Pastel on Wednesday, like etcetera, that's a great idea."

Interviewee 11 provides insight into the lack of variety by discussing poor communication and inconsistency that could lead to a misleading or limited dining experience:

“Um, yeah. Like, there's not, like, a good, like, connection between, like, what's actually going on in the dining hall and the apps that they're, like, pushing on us to, like, have, that's supposed to give us, like, the proper information, and, like, when I look at some of this stuff, they don't even, like, update it for day to day on, like, what they're serving, and so, like, and, like, when you get there, they haven't updated, like, the little signs they have out, and so, like, you have no idea, like, what you're eating, um, and so, like, because I don't have any allergies and stuff like that, like, that's not too big of an issue for me, but for, like, some people, like, It's like a really big problem, like not being able to see what's in, what the food that they just have out is.”

Finally, Interviewee 11 shows the lack of variety by expressing dissatisfaction with the current options provided to students and emphasizing the need for improvement in the dining services through their statement:

“Oftentimes when I go to find food on campus, um, sometimes it's okay, but it's just not what I'm used to and I feel like they could do better in that aspect of having more variety and choices for healthy options.”

Conclusion

The quotes put together all point towards a common notion that there is a lack of diversity in the food served in universities and thus the students are dissatisfied and should be served better. From the direct requests regarding a larger number of dining places and various food options to criticism regarding the sameness and lack of healthy food in the current restaurants, students' desire for more culinary variety is evident. These feelings demonstrate that there is a discrepancy between what students expect from dining services and what is actually available on campus, indicating that these issues need to be brought to light to improve dining services and make them better suited to the needs of the university population.

Food Quality at the University of Denver

by: Sophia Herrera

Introduction

Through interviews taken at the University of Denver, an emerging theme regarding food quality had surfaced. More specifically, these issues were related to the excessive use of oil, cleanliness, and the nutritional value of meals provided in Dining Hall. These concerns go beyond taste preferences and extend to serious health risks and the overall dining experience. Students who were interviewed and voiced their dissatisfaction through various interviews highlighted the impact of these issues on their physical health, daily routines, and university experience.

Concerns About Food Quality

A recurring issue among students is the excessive use of oil in the Dining Hall. One student stated while talking about her religious dietary restrictions, "I cannot have anything smothered in oil. I said anything that boiled or dressed with like lemon or vinegar, can we do something like that" while another student claimed that "-I go between thinking that the food is healthy and then I'm like, is it really? Because like definitely not like the grill. And then sometimes 7 spoons is a bit greasier." This concern with heavy use of oil in food preparation is more than a complaint related to the taste of food and has multiple health risks associated with it. High oil content can contribute to weight gain and obesity due to its high caloric density and poor satiety, making it easier to consume excess calories. A student stated that at DU, "They fry a whole bunch of oil and then put oil on top it later and also, the noodles that you can get with it are in oil, so that's very fattening." Without access to foods without oil, it seems inevitable that students are concerned with the long-term impacts on their physical health. Individuals who eat excessive amounts of oils intake excessive amounts of saturated and trans fats which elevate bad cholesterol levels and promote cardiovascular diseases. Inflammation is also associated with oil and conditions such as indigestion and acid reflux. This is a major contribution to how students feel after eating food prepared by Sodexo. One interviewee said, "Cooked meat with like various sides that stuff always looks good, but it doesn't make me feel good." Other students state that the meat has a reputation for not even being cooked, "Yeah, they improved on the quality of the food. I remember when you would go to stir fry, and the containers of meat were like, full of blood, and now they're not, so." Illness from Dining Hall is a reoccurring issue for many people, one interviewee stated, "I think every year except for this I've gotten food poisoning from like undercooked meat like stir fry so I'm still a little bit hesitant to eat stir fry and a bunch of my friends agree." Beyond the amount of oil in the food, raw meat could be causing students to report "at the beginning of the year after almost every meal I used to get stomach aches. I was probably just adjusting, but, like that doesn't seem normal." This issue is affecting students differently as stated by an individual whose friend "pretty much never ever comes to the dining hall because it makes her feel more sick than it does me."

Issues with Ingredients and Cleanliness

Many students at the University have experienced food poisoning and express concerns about the possibility of foodborne illnesses, stating "Sometimes somebody will get sick and I'm kind of

worried because other people are worried because I never got sick or food poisoning, but I'm sure it could happen." Beyond oil use, there could be other factors causing the student body to get sick from the food at the Dining Hall. This could include the practices of the workers or typical practices such not washing produce. Many students claim that the overall quality of ingredients and cleanliness in the Dining Hall. One alarming account was, "I heard someone found a nail in their food. That's all I've heard." Equally disturbing experiences were also reported a student complained of finding spiders in their salads. These cases took place last year and may have been a factor in the closing of Greens station. The report made by the student was, "I don't think that they washed the veggies at Greens because sophomore year there were spiders in my salads, in my spinach, multiple times." while another student reported a similar incident "If a school doesn't have the right types of foods, their students will get sick. Another one of my friends, she's athletic and healthy, found a bug in the salad bar one time. After this, she refused to eat there again. Little things like that can really affect a student population." With these multiple instances where food cleanliness has become a concern, the student body reflects an overall suspicion of the food served at the Dining Hall.

Nutritional Value and Options

Beyond the safety factors related to food preparation, students have voiced concern with the nutritional value of food, especially the amount of protein offered. One student suggested that this could be improved using "better ingredients to make foods with high protein and less fat, and they can have more options available." This indicates a desire for healthier, more balanced meal options that cater to diverse dietary needs and preferences. Students have also claimed that it would be difficult to be vegan and maintain a balanced diet with the food supplied by the University. One was a vegan until three months before arriving at the University because he knew he would not be able to maintain his habits at the school while consuming enough protein. Many students also touch on how the meals provided by the university do not have the of protein for a male (20 grams). Whether it is due to religious reasons, medical conditions, or personal preferences, students at the university require a diverse selection of options. Currently, students feel unrepresented in the cafeteria and are limited in what they can use their required meal plan on.

Conclusion

The concerns about food quality at the University of Denver span various issues, from excessive oil use and undercooked meats to poor ingredient quality and lack of nutritional options. These problems significantly impact students' physical health, leading to weight gain, digestive issues, and foodborne illnesses, while also affecting their overall dining experience and social interactions. The recurring themes from student interviews underscore the need for the university to address these concerns by improving food preparation practices, investing in better quality ingredients, and providing more diverse and nutritious meal options. By doing so, the University of Denver can enhance the well-being and satisfaction of its students, making their dining experience safer and more enjoyable.

Food Quality at DU

by: Tommy Hoffman

Introduction

Eating food that is fulfilling and well-balanced is an extremely important component to everyday life because it provides energy needed to sustain a day and provides nutrients needed for growth, strength, and overall health. Being able to eat food that fulfills these qualities is something that students at DU have had challenges with. Interviewees describe the ideal standards of food to be clean and diverse, and also say that these things are hard to find in the community commons. Below are some examples of what interviewees have to say about food quality at DU.

This first quote describes some of the dining options at the DU dining hall, and how this person feels about the health of some of those options. This quote also gives insight into the variance of some of the food at the dining hall and illustrates the general feelings around the food that is there:

“I feel like at DU like I go between thinking that the food is healthy and then I'm like, is it really? Because like definitely not the grill. And then sometimes 7 spoons is a bit greasier. Like this is definitely not helpful for me.”

This next quote outlines the work students feel that they have to put into acquiring healthy food options. This quote also shows how the stations at the DU community commons do not seem to be very balanced, in the sense of protein, carbs, vegetables, dairy, and fruits/fibers:

“It takes... you actually have to put in effort to try to find, like, food to get enough protein, get enough vegetables, get enough fruit, and get enough dairy in one meal. Like, you have to go to multiple stations in the dining hall in order to accommodate all of those things. You can't just get it all from one station if that makes sense.”

This next quote outlines some of the differences students could find from eating at home versus eating at the dining hall. The quote gives perspective on students who feel that they have had healthy and sustaining food options at home, and how that compares to the food at DU. The quote also outlines some concerns about the freshness and quality of produce and vegetables in the dining hall:

“I grew up eating a lot of healthy food and Oftentimes when I go to find food on campus, um, sometimes it's okay, but it's just not what I'm used to and I feel like they could do better in that aspect of having more variety and choices for healthy options... I would say, like, a lot of food maybe isn't the most fresh, or like, there aren't as many options for, like, vegetables and greens. I've noticed a lot of the time, like, I'm a big salad person, and a lot of times when I go to, like, different salad bars and stuff, it's just, like, I don't know if it's old, or they just, it's not put out correctly or washed, but it just doesn't feel, I don't necessarily feel as good when I eat it compared to when I like prepare it myself or eat at home with my family.”

This next quote offers insight into how students with heavier course loads think about the dining hall and food in general. It shows how some people just aren't too focused on this issue, and offers possible conclusions as to why this topic isn't brought up as much as one would think:

“Sometimes when I have a heavy week ahead of me, um, some assignments just hit me out of nowhere and I mainly focus on getting those assignments done instead of worrying about where or when my next meal is going to be.”

This quote goes along with the previous one by showing a reason why people aren't as tuned into this issue but differs in that reason. This quote outlines how Sodexo does not really say how healthy their food is, by not saying the macros and overall nutritional value of the food:

“Yeah, that's why I'm just like I don't know if it's healthy or not.”

This next quote talks specifically about one of the sections at the dining hall, stir fry, and how it is not very fresh. Stir fry is an area of the dining hall that people don't like as much and have complained about, and this quote offers insight into the complaints about raw, undercooked food at the station:

“And then sometimes it's just like squishy and I'm like, damn, seriously, like, not fresh, kind of been sitting and like out for a super long time, um, And I know like a lot of people had issues with the chicken at stir fry, and so like now it's like precooked and then they cook it again, but like before it was like raw, and Like, they're cooking everything for the same amount of time, which just isn't correct.”

This final quote puts into perspective some of the drawbacks of not providing healthy, fulfilling food. This quote shows how this person just won't eat because the dining hall is not providing food that she feels is good and fulfilling. The quote shows the butterfly effect of this problem:

“Especially when the dining hall doesn't have food that I like. That's when the panic sets in and I'm just like, Damn, what am I gonna eat if there's nothing in the dining hall?”

Conclusion

In conclusion, the common findings from these quotes highlight several issues with the overall dining experience at DU. One big takeaway was that students expressed concerns about the healthiness, freshness, and variety of the food offered. Students often find it a challenge to eat balanced, healthy meals without having to visit multiple stations. Students also expressed major dissatisfaction with the quality and preparation of the food in the dining hall. They also feel that the lack of transparency regarding the nutritional value of the food creates even more challenges when it comes to making decisions about what they are going to eat. Additionally, students who work heavy course loads prioritize the work over the dining hall and eating, which also pushes the issue forward. Overall, the main takeaway is that the DU dining hall's offerings do not consistently meet students' expectations for healthy, fresh, and convenient meal options.

Food Quality

by: Haydon Jamison

Introduction

An important aspect of a student's general success during college is their ability to maintain a healthy lifestyle which allows them to maximize their potential. A crucial part of living a healthy lifestyle is a healthy and balanced diet. Even if a student knows what is healthy to put in their body versus what is not, without access to proper nutrition, students may have no other option than to consume food that has negative effects on their health. This can affect other areas of a student's life such as their ability to perform at their best academically, socially and maintain a motivated and active lifestyle. A common theme found with undergraduate students living on campus interviewed at the University of Denver was the lack of access to proper nutrition and quality of food through the university dining services. Even though there are supposedly healthier options for students on the dining hall meal plan, many students feel they are only left with lower quality food that does not make them feel good or healthy.

This quote from a student offers insight into the general thoughts amongst some students around the dining hall food.

“I would say, like, a lot of food maybe isn't the most fresh, or like, there aren't as many options for, like, vegetables and greens. I've noticed a lot of the time, like, I'm a big salad person, and a lot of times when I go to, like, different salad bars and stuff, it's just, like, I don't know if it's old, or they just, it's not put out correctly or washed, but it just doesn't feel, I don't necessarily feel as good when I eat it compared to when I like prepare it myself or eat at home with my family. It's, it's just not the same. And so I wonder, I often find myself wondering like if it's just not as good or like the best option I could be doing for myself when it comes to nutrition.”

Even though the university makes an effort to provide healthier options such as a salad bar in this case, often times students find the food to make them feel not as good as they normally would when they eat the same food elsewhere. Many feel like the quality is what makes the food unhealthy, which leads to them not feeling as good as they could be, as opposed to the type of food that is offered.

Another example comes from a student who works as a residential assistant in one of the on-campus dorms, which has given them more insights than most into the thoughts of other students and their experiences with the dining hall food:

“I don't feel as if I'm full or feeling good about what I ate and I know that a lot of my residents have struggled with similar things. I have residents who are celiac who don't have access to a proper nutritionist at DU's dining hall.”

In addition to generally feeling bad about what they eat, students with dietary

complications find it even harder to receive the support they need. Even though DU has a nutritionist, many students are either unaware of this resource or find it ineffective as there is only so much, they can do in terms of the food quality provided. This interviewee offers a specific example of how even though a student may be able to get proper allergy accommodations, the food they are left with still makes them feel like they are eating unhealthily:

“I do have proper food accommodations for my allergies. I'm allergic to cashews, pistachios and so far I haven't run into any of those. And I do not think any of the food is the healthiest option. Probably the stir fry, but they fry a whole bunch of oil and then put oil on top it later and also the noodles that you can get with it are in oil, so that's very fattening.”

Another example of a student's outlook on the dining hall food compared with eating fast food emphasizes that food quality is lacking and affects students' food insecurity. The interviewee states:

“Sometimes I do worry about like, okay, what am I going to eat? Is that going to be healthy for me? Is that going to make me feel good? Because most times if I eat something quick, it's fast food and fast food doesn't always make me feel great and that's kind of similar to eating at the dining hall where sometimes I'll eat and I'll be like, I don't feel Like I don't feel satisfied.”

Conclusion

All of these quotes describe the general sentiment around the quality of food the university offers. When the only option a student has for a meal is one that makes them feel like they are putting low quality food into their body, making them feel unhealthy, it can carry over into other aspects of their school life. This can limit the amount of energy they have throughout the day, which can affect academic performance as well as athletic and social aspects. It can also discourage them from seeking out a balanced diet as they feel like certain food stations offer lower quality ingredients that make them feel unwell. In order for a student to thrive and get the most out of their college experience, there needs to be access to healthier food that does not make students feel like they are putting poor quality food in their body on a daily basis.

A Call to Action: A Need for Better Communication and Accommodation

by: Titus Ramsey

Sufficient information, and appropriate actions in response to that information, is key to any system running smoothly within the University of Denver, especially one that's dedicated to serving the nutritional needs of those it's responsible for. Having a clear layout of all the food resources available to students increases the likelihood of a healthy experience while on campus. In addition, ensuring that the food provided by the university is fresh and catered to one's food restrictions should be a part of this basic responsibility. To not explicitly state what ingredients a dish has and not changing the labels within the dining hall is completely unacceptable.

A lack of communication and accommodation results in not only the dissatisfaction of students but may potentially risk the wellbeing of people. For instance, those with minor or severe allergies rely on labels to determine what to avoid, and alternative meals as they look for something to eat. By not switching out labels or not accurately displaying what ingredients are present within a dish, DU risks the health of its students. In addition, when students are unable to find or get food due to external circumstances, it's also DU's job to alert those on campus of resources and their changes. Take the DU food pantry which, although claims to be inclusive, is located in a space few know about. Or the c-stores, whose schedule, and hours sometimes change without the knowledge of students.

Feedback from students has consistently highlighted a widespread frustration with the lack of information available. For instance, a student with dairy sensitivities expressed their exasperation while navigating the dining hall. This anecdote underscores the stigma surrounding food allergies and the insensitivity of food preparers to these dietary restrictions:

"I am very lactose intolerant, so like I break out in rashes and I get like really bad cramps and I can get nauseous, so I tend to kind of stay away from any kind of dairy products, which can be kind of hard to kind of ask people because I think it's kind of overlooked, I feel like people are like "oh you're just lactose intolerant, it's not a big deal if you have something with a little dairy in it." An example of this is at a lot of places they use butter in their meals and cheese, and I feel like there should be a better way for all places but especially the dining hall to mitigate that. It's really just more of an annoyance that I have to ask if something has dairy in it when the dining hall could just label things as dairy-free."

According to the following quote, there also seems to be a lack of sufficient/long term materials to make sustainable labels. The speaker also insinuates that these food descriptions aren't regularly replaced, leading to students having limited understanding of what's going into their food:

“...when it comes to the algae labels, they put it on like a tiny little thing, and it always moves around and gets knocked out of place, so you don't actually know which thing, like, which pasta dish is vegetarian. So it's like, it would be best if they did their best to advertise what it is that people are eating.” (Interview 8)

One especially understands this idea when reading a quote by a student with a vegetarian diet, who also has an allergy. The comment shows the general unfairness students with restrictive diets face; students are either forced to eat the meals presented to them, or go hungry. There's also a fundamental lack of alternative meals for dietary restrictions or allergies. Serving one part of the university's demographic, whether unintentional or not, creates food inequality and leaves many students to fend for themselves.

Uh, well I'm vegetarian and then I'm allergic to like peanut butter and Nutella and stuff like that. But uh, there's not very, it was really hard freshman and sophomore year for like vegetarian stuff in the dining hall. I don't know what it is now. Because they wouldn't even like accommodate for different people. It was either you eat normal or you eat vegan and vegan food is gross. It's bad especially in dining halls (Interview 7)

Or, take the following story, which focuses on an undergraduate who can't eat pork due to her religion. The story is particularly impactful, showcasing the university's knowledge of religious holidays and obligations and the lack of effort to make religious accommodations:

“I'm in a cultural anthropology class, and we talk about religion, we talk about food, we talk about everything.

Um, and there's this one girl in my class who's Muslim, and she had this story that, like, I just have not been able to get out of my head..... She had this one story where she went to [the cafeteria] late at night, because that was the time of day where the dining hall was open and when she could eat, and she went and pretty much all that was available had pork in it, which wasn't really something that would work for for her and the dietary restrictions related to her religion.

It was also really interesting because she talked about how that same day, DU put up a post on their Instagram or something like “Happy Ramadan”.

So they knew it was Ramadan, but they didn't apply that thinking to the dining hall in a way that was actually fully considerate of and accommodating towards people who celebrated Ramadan.”

Lack of food accessibility doesn't just mean lack of food, however. For example, those who have allergies have to seek out resources to avoid becoming sick. However, if one can't find those resources, it makes it extremely difficult to keep oneself safe while also finding a sufficient meal. As per the quote below, there's a general lack of information in these areas:

“Yeah, so most of the time, when you come in, you don't even hear from the allergist. I had to seek her out. It was just recommended, like, on whatever DU's onboarding thing was like if you have allergies, go ahead and reach out to her.” (Interview 3)

The quote below also demonstrates a lack of information regarding alternative resources, such as the food pantry:

“I think that first, they can make the food pantry more widely known. I mean, I didn't even know it was a thing until now and I don't know anyone who uses it, but can surely benefit from it. I also think that DU should provide more to-go options in the dining hall. Small things that I can bring home and eat like apples or oranges would be helpful. Even more healthy options would be better for the students too. A lot of the food there is just okay.”

In addition to the person above, many interviewees stated that they had never heard of or had seen the DU food pantry. This observation is concerning, as depending on personal circumstances, the food pantry might be one of the students' only options. The lack of awareness about the food pantry's existence and services could lead to students being unable to access the necessary resources, which is a serious concern.

The quote below provides an insightful observation about the cafeteria's fluctuating hours. While colleges and departments have the right to change their hours or create new ones, they must take proactive steps to notify those they serve of the times stations close. Any confusion in operating hours can significantly impact their access to meals:

“A lot of places close early or have weird hours or options by the weekend. Does that make sense? Like there aren't a lot of options to begin with but if I have to be on campus during the weekend I sometimes feel like I have to hunt things down.”

Students should find solace in knowing they can have a sufficient meal at any of these locations. However, the need for more information regarding food and the difficulties of navigating spaces without proper assistance lead many to seek resources outside of campus. Take the student below, who finds that the lack of quality of food on campus forces them to eat out:

I never trusted DU to have healthy food to begin with, and even fresh food. DU as a college is not that good, but the food here is not that good or fresh, so eating out might be better than eating food here (Interview 2).

To conclude, students at DU find the information and accommodations regarding food on campus mediocre. In comparison, there are resources on campus, such as the food pantry, but the need for more information limits their usefulness. In addition, little precautions are taken when it comes to labeling the ingredients within food, thus forcing individuals to either go out of

their way to find help or take risks. While DU recognizes the individual diets of its students, there are few precautionary substitutes for those students to have sufficient meals.

Conclusion

I most certainly agree with this summary. It's my opinion that the responsibility of the university is to inform students about their resources and the ingredients within food, thereby significantly improving the quality of life for those on campus. Merely acknowledging the diverse diets of students is not enough; a truly inclusive university takes proactive measures to cater to these diets. DU should also understand that students on campus have different living situations, and therefore, access to information about alternative resources should be readily available. While the university prides itself on its gift of education, its priority must be the well-being of the students it serves. Students come to campus to learn and build their lives, and food should be the least of their concerns.

Car Access

by: Cecelia Jones

Introduction

Having access to a car was an important factor that influenced the ability of third- and fourth-year University of Denver off-campus students to access food and impacted their food security. Many interviewees expressed how having a car made accessing food easier, while those who do not have cars discussed how difficult and time-consuming going to the grocery store was. The interview responses show that having access to a car correlates with having more access to food and to interviewees feeling more secure about their access to food. Students with cars were able to go to the grocery store whenever they needed to because of their ability to drive to the store; many interviewees with cars also felt less stressed about accessing food and thought that it was easy to access healthy food. Interviewees without cars, on the other hand, were more likely to be nervous about where their next meal was coming from or nervous about how they would access food and go grocery shopping. Several students without cars viewed grocery shopping as an incredibly time-consuming activity. Overall, students without cars were more likely to express having trouble accessing food than students with cars.

The student from Interview 3, who does not have a car, discussed how much time walking to the nearest grocery store takes. The following quote from Interview 3 demonstrates how the interviewee is forced to take time out of their day to walk to and from the grocery store. Because of their lack of access to a car, this student felt like going grocery shopping was incredibly stressful and time-consuming.

“I have to walk with a cart. It’s ridiculous. Because it’s also like a half a mile down from where I live...that’s not that long, but it is a 25-minute walk because I’m a slow walker...if I need to get groceries, it’s damn near impossible for me to go without a car.”
(Interview 3)

The student from Interview 7 also does not have a car and is reliant on the bus for transportation to and from the grocery store. The quote below demonstrates how the student often felt unsafe and uncomfortable using the bus, which caused them to avoid going to the grocery store. Later in the interview, the student also brought up how difficult and time-consuming it was to walk to the grocery store, which contributed to them facing food insecurity and lacking access to healthy food, which led to them losing a significant amount of weight. This student’s experience stresses how not having access to a car may mean that students do not have access to food at all.

“And like the bus is fine, but like there’s creepy people. Like one time there was this man that wouldn’t leave me alone and I was just like it’s either wait for the bus and be creeped out for 20 more minutes to be comfortable taking my groceries back or walk 20 minutes with, and I like, just walk.” (Interview 7)

Students with cars did not deal with the same transportation and food insecurity issues as students without cars. The student from Interview 4, who has a car, stated that their access to a car meant that they were not worried about where their next meal would come from. The quote below highlights how this student felt like having access to a car during their third year at DU increased their food security, which demonstrates how access to a car and access to food are associated.

“I’d say it got better because I didn’t have a car when I was, um, living on campus. So, well, I guess I had the dining hall, but if I wanted groceries, it was, could be hard to get. So, like, a car definitely was really helpful for getting food.” (Interview 4)

The student interviewed in Interview 1 also had a car. In their interview, this student expressed how much easier accessing fresh, healthy food was with a car. The quote below emphasizes how this student believes that access to a car leads to a healthier lifestyle and better access to food. It also shows how this student believes that they have more access to healthy food now that they have a car than they did when they did not have a car; this highlights how access to a car is associated with access to food.

“Just to put it blankly, it’s easier to kind of go to fresh markets, easier to go to like local farms, and get fresh produce from them when you have a car. It’s also easier to get to grocery stores that kind of facilitate a healthier lifestyle, such as Whole Foods, King Soopers, and down University Boulevard, that otherwise wouldn’t have been able to be accessible my freshman and sophomore years.” (Interview 1)

Interview 5 was conducted with another student who has a car and, like other students with cars, this student also reported that they had access to food and did not feel food insecure. This student had to drive to campus every day, but even with their commute they still found time to cook and go grocery shopping. The quote below shows how this student was not struggling with food insecurity because they could go to the grocery store whenever they needed to buy food. For this student, going to the grocery store was not a big, time-consuming event that needed to be planned out in advance like it was for students without cars.

“I tend to make my plan then go to the grocery store and anything for meals that I might want to cook throughout the week and I go shop for that. I don’t usually make a list but I also don’t tend to get that much each trip. I mostly go for the basics.” (Interview 5)

While the student interviewed in Interview 6 said that they sometimes felt like grocery shopping was a chore and could be expensive and expressed feeling food insecure at times, they also felt like having a car made accessing food easier. In the quote below, the student is answering a question about if they worry about where their next meal will come from. As one can see from their response, the main factor causing this student to stress about food or where their next meal will come from was not access to transportation, but time and having food go bad before they could eat it. Immediately after giving the following response, the student said that having a car “makes things a whole lot easier,” showcasing how even when students may

feel food insecure due to a lack of time or other resources, having a car still has a positive impact on food access.

“Truthfully, tonight, for one because I have no food in my apartment and I either have to go grocery shopping or I have to go get food somewhere. So, yes, but it’s more because I am lazy and food expires fast and I am a busy college student. Sometimes I just don’t eat my food in time and waste it.” (Interview 6)

Conclusion

These quotes from third and fourth year off-campus students highlight how having access to a car greatly impacts one’s access to food and food security. The quotes from students with cars show how having a car makes going to the grocery store and buying food easier, while the quotes from students without cars show how time-consuming and troublesome accessing food can be without a car. In my opinion, these findings show that students with cars are almost always more food secure than students without cars because these students can drive to grocery stores and buy fresh, healthy foods whenever they need or want to. Students without cars, on the other hand, have a much harder time getting to and from the grocery store. Since DU lacks on-campus grocery shopping options for third- and fourth-year students, it is harder and more time-consuming for students without cars to access food, making them more likely to experience food insecurity.

Accessibility and Accommodations for Food Allergies

by: Molly Madden

Introduction

As a student at the University of Denver, you become very familiar with the gaps in the dining hall and food around campus. Unfortunately, these so-called gaps in the dining halls can be detrimental for people because of various food allergies and sensitivities. Our goal was to learn about access to healthy food for people who live off campus. The common theme across the board was the problem of allergies and food sensitivities that people have. As some background, the dining hall has menus displayed above the food options for that day, but there are a few problems that go along with this. Often, the menus do not match what the food is. Though this is more of an annoyance, it can also be very dangerous for people because they could accidentally eat something that they are very allergic to. Menus are also very inconclusive about potential allergies that are in those foods. They may say “nut-free” but that is often not the case. I am very fortunate that I do not have any of these life-threatening allergies, but for the people who do, it can be very dangerous.

Over 85 million people in the United States suffer from anaphylaxis which is a food allergy that is life-threatening. When these people do not have the proper support or information, a simple meal can result in severe consequences. Many of the interviewees discussed how they do not feel supported by the University of Denver allergists which can be a very unnerving and anxiety-provoking feeling.

“No. Oh, my God. Yeah, so most of the time, when you come in, you don't even hear from the allergist. I had to seek her out. It was just recommended, like, on whatever DU's onboarding thing was like if you have allergies, go ahead and reach out to her.”

(Interview 3)

This interviewee is speaking from their Freshman perspective, it is very overwhelming to be a Freshman, so having the added pressure to seek out this allergist that isn't very helpful is extremely daunting. Labeling meals is what could save someone's life, people who have allergies or sensitivities look at those menus to see if they are able to eat that meal.

“They tried to, um, have vegetarian options, gluten free options. They were limited, but they were making more efforts to try and accommodate stuff like that. And to try and label, like, allergy warnings, but the labels weren't always on the right dish. So, I would say there's still room to grow in that area.” (Interview 8)

I know many people who have severe allergies and have gotten very sick from the dining hall because they ate something that was incorrectly labeled. A method that we discussed in class that may help prevent these occurrences is better planning from the staff that is in charge. If they match the menus with the meals in advance, there is less of a chance that the menus will be incorrect.

People who are lactose intolerant also have to be cautious in the dining hall. They have a separate refrigerator for almond milk and other options for food-sensitive people, but that is not enough for a main meal.

“An example of this is at a lot of places they use butter in their meals and cheese, and I feel like there should be a better way for all places but especially the dining hall to mitigate that. It’s really just more of an annoyance that I have to ask if something has dairy in it when the dining hall could just label things as dairy-free.” (Interview One)

This interviewee suggests that a simple fix would be labeling meals as dairy-free, but from what I have learned, the staff may not even know that. Though this is not a life-threatening allergy, it is still enough to severely impact someone's day. The relation between each of these examples would be more awareness of what is being served. This would involve better planning on the staff's part which also means more work. I would argue that even if they have to work harder, it is more beneficial to keep the students safe.

Rather than being allergic to foods, some students are vegan or vegetarians by choice. This promotes a new challenge because it is hard to eat nutritious food when you do not eat meat. There are often meals in the dining hall that you don't know if there is meat in them. One of my close friends is vegetarian because of her religion, and the only thing that she feels safe to eat is the cheese pizza. Though this can be a fun meal every now and again, it does not have the proper nutritional value that students need to excel in class, and life in general.

“It was really hard freshman and sophomore year for like vegetarian stuff in the dining hall. I don't know what it is now. Because they wouldn't even like accommodate for different people. It was either you eat normal or you eat vegan and vegan food is gross it's bad especially in dining halls. There's nothing else Like I didn't notice how drastically I was losing weight until people started pointing it out and they were like you Look sick.” (Interview 7)

Just because being vegetarian or vegan is a choice does not mean that it is any less important than a food allergy. This person explains that they lost so much weight that their friends were concerned which means they likely skipped meals and were not getting the proper nutrition. In my opinion, this is unacceptable because it is unfair to the student, as well as it does not reflect the amount of money that we pay each year.

Transitioning to the topic of the management of the dining hall, do they really know what they are serving and what is in those meals? Likely not, from an outsider's perspective, I feel that they think all students can eat anything that they are served and that it is their responsibility to advocate for themselves. Though this is partially true, staff should also be willing to work with students rather than get annoyed when students ask about food accommodation.

“Um, in the dining hall. I don't know how much control they even have because it actually means everything, but um maybe cause they have the pure and simple station,

but they still make everything in the same pan.” (Interview 10)

I agree with this interviewee that the everyday staff does not have much control of what they are serving. I do not think they mean to do harm when they cook things in the same pan, but instead, they are so understaffed that they have to be as efficient as possible. Though this may not be the correct thing to do, their hand is being forced by the people in charge. One of the common topics right now is how understaffed and “cheap” the dining hall is. In my opinion, this is not due to lack of funds but instead, they are working to save money for more pressing matters. If they paid five extra people to run a food-sensitive station, they would not only be able to offer this to their students, but it would also be easier on the staff.

Even when you do not have allergies, it is still unnerving to not know what you are consuming. Whether this is because the signs are not up or they say the wrong thing, everyone deserves to know what they are eating.

“However, with food options, sometimes I never knew what I was eating. There would be like some tofu stuff that I thought was chicken I remember. And yeah, God knows what’s in the sauces.” (Interview 11)

I found this quote very interesting; this interviewee gave the perspective of a student with no food restrictions but still had complaints that mirrored students’ complaints who had severe food allergies. I was also able to relate to this because I ate something that I thought was something else. Not only is this unpleasant, but it can be detrimental to one’s health if they happen to be allergic to what they accidentally ate.

The final perspective that I want to discuss is the transparency that the school has about its accommodations for incoming freshmen. When I was an incoming freshman, I was told how accommodating DU was in terms of food and that if you had an allergy then you would just have to talk to the dietitian, and she would help figure it all out. The following interview discusses what it is really like to deal with the dietitian when you have a severe allergy.

“Absolutely. And also, like the dietitian can truly... I don’t know she’s I don’t want to say incompetent. Like, she doesn’t seem to like be needed until there’s an emergency and it’s like, you should be more proactive than having to react to a situation in my opinion.” (Interview 3)

This interview discusses more of the safety aspect that comes from the dietitian. The interviewee’s point is that if she was more forward-thinking and was able to prevent things before they happened that would keep students much safer. Currently, someone will get an allergic reaction and then the dietitian is left to put out a fire so to speak, but if she worked with the student to prevent this from happening, the reaction may not have been as severe or in a perfect world may not have even happened.

Conclusion

Overall, the problem of accessibility and accommodations for food allergies is a large problem at the University of Denver, and not improving it will result in more students getting sick. From what I have observed throughout the interviews and speaking with people, if we hire more people in the dining hall that would allow for things to be more organized, and therefore people will be more aware of what they are eating. My hope is that these interviews will encourage people to help solve this problem and make the dining hall a safer and healthier place to eat.

Access to Healthy Food/Food Choices

by: Sophie Robertson

Introduction

Access to healthy food options is difficult for many college students. Students that live off campus are more responsible for selecting their groceries and preparing their meals than those that live on campus and rely mostly on the meal plan. It can be more difficult to choose healthy options due to increased prices for quality produce, time restrictions, and overall education about what foods are considered healthy. A healthy and balanced diet is essential to a productive and healthy life, but when students do not have this, it can create a mirage of stress and health issues. These were highlighted in almost every interview.

“I have ADHD and anxiety, so having less sugar and not like processed sugar, instead of opting for more natural sugars like honey, fruits, and berries, rather than like Jolly Ranchers and Gushers. Instead of a huge Starbucks coffee, I can make healthier versions at home. I felt so much better, I can sleep so much better, I’m able to control my emotions a lot more, so like, I’m not having as many panic attacks, I’m not as frustrated or irritable. Just overall, I’ve been a better person, nicer, calmer, more kind of like a soft entrance to life versus like, I’m stressed and overwhelmed”

This is an example from someone that does have access to and prioritizes healthy eating and organic, farm-fresh food. This person’s perspective was definitely rare in comparison to the rest, but they also highlighted how eating healthy has drastically improved their mental health and brain function. I chose to start with this quote to highlight just how much food can impact overall mental health. This was one of the only participants that highlighted this connection, yet it is imperative that people realize how much their diet affects their brain and mental health. It is clear that this type of priority is not as evident among other interviewees, which is why it is important for DU to give students extra support to ensure that their mental clarity and mental health is prioritized.

“Ya so for food I get more food from fast food places, and I keep some in the freezer from when I am hungry and need to eat food, but I don't have time, so I just warm it up and eat it. For example, I will go to Jimmy Johns, and I'll get two or three sandwiches and I will eat one and freeze the other two for tomorrow or the day after” (interview 2)

Time constraint seems to be an issue among all participants when it comes to prioritizing healthy food. College students are often very busy, and everyone has a different solution to trying to get a meal in.

“Which is like, obviously healthy inherently. But I feel like they at least aim for hearty proteins and grains and like a balanced plate. So, I think yes, they're healthier. But also I mean like, they're cooked in a dining hall. I have no idea, like, how much oils they're

using or what type, so inherently we'll never kind of really know, but they definitely have healthy options" (interview 3)

This person lives off campus but occasionally uses the dining halls. They discuss trying to eat the healthier options, but it is hard to know just how many calories or protein you're really consuming due to misleading labels and excessive oil and butter use. This can make it difficult to be intentional with nutrition when students are led to believe that they're consuming healthy meals, but the calories or amount of sodium or sugar are misleading.

"I try to eat healthy, but I definitely have meals that I can just heat up in the microwave. I've had like times when I couldn't get fancy with it and some situations where I really had to get creative with what I already had but I think financially there's a lot of options if you do your research on what you can get and how much you're really like going to eat" (interview 5)

These participants discussed both their perspectives on living on campus and off campus. They try to prioritize protein, but this is hard when factoring in cost. Because of this, sometimes microwave meals are their only option, which is usually not as nutritious or has more preservatives. This is another example of a solution, similar to the second quote, where students are just trying to figure out how to get by and remain fed even if it's not entirely ideal.

"Um, and also, it's also just really cheap at the grocery store. Um, but, you know, I try my best to incorporate things that are fresh because I just feel better when I'm eating them, but also make sure that I at least have one meal with reliable protein. Um, whether that's like sausage in the morning or, um, meat at night. So I do my best to consider protein and veggies, but otherwise, um, like price is a pretty big priority and also just convenience since I don't have a lot of time nowadays for like time consuming cooking"

This person tries to prioritize fresh produce, but price and time can get in the way of cooking these healthy meals. This narrative was definitely echoed throughout multiple interviews. Those without cars have even less time to go to a grocery store due to the increased amount of time it takes to reach a grocery store. These people opt for quick and easy fast food. With that being said, it is no secret that more healthy foods cost more, which is difficult for college students that should be prioritizing their nutrition to feel and do their best.

"Um, yeah. Like, like this is my dinner, for example, these Sour PatchKids....I usually only eat one meal per day, um usually dinner and, um, sometimes I'll just sort of like forego that"

This person does not have the time or resources to prioritize healthy and nutrient-dense meals. They also claim to skip dinner or only eat one meal a day. This could be due to time, mental health, or access. Regardless, this type of diet is not a good base for productive brain and body function. This is not the fault of the student, and this type of diet is not uncommon among other college students.

“But, um, I do worry about it a little bit more, um especially because I try to be as mindful as I can with shopping and spendage and how I plan my meals, and I find myself just like a lot less motivated to cook nowadays for different reasons and so I’d say there’s a little bit more anxiety surrounding it, but uh I’m still in a pretty secure place where I know that I can get food if I really need it.”

This quote is important in highlighting that even those that have access to food still have anxiety surrounding budgeting and actually cooking. It is not just about not having the means to get food, but also about the individuality of each person and the factors that might make healthy eating difficult despite the desire to want to eat healthy.

Conclusion

Overall, access to healthy food is imperative for the mental health of college students. It is clear that this is difficult for most participants, which snowballs into a number of other problems in a student’s life. It is clear that college students are willing to get creative to get a meal (frozen fast food, microwave meals, candy), but there is also an awareness that it is not necessarily ideal and that it could be easier with support from DU or access to transportation and money.

Time Constraints

by: Amanda Modernel

Introduction

Food insecurity is defined as the condition of not having access to sufficient food or food of adequate quality to meet one's basic needs. This project aimed to identify food insecurity among college students and to determine the main contributing factors. Additionally, it sought to research the prevalence and usage of the food pantry at the University of Denver. A variety of upperclassman undergraduate students, including those working jobs and athletes with busy schedules and limited time, were interviewed. Time constraints have been identified as a key factor contributing to food insecurity among upperclassmen undergraduate college students at the University of Denver.

The issue begins with the fact that “most college students don't have time to work” as stated by an interviewee in interview four when asked what makes being food insecure so different and particular for college students. Having a stable source of income is crucial for accessing food, whether through the campus dining hall, the grocery store, or fast food. However, students are often constrained by their demanding academic schedules and other responsibilities, making it difficult to maintain regular employment.

The issue is further compounded by the fact that cooking healthy food requires significant time and effort. An interviewee in interview two stated that they “get more food from fast food places” and “keep some in the freezer for when [they are] hungry and need to eat food” but don't have time to cook. Another interviewee from interview eight expressed the high priority of convenience for students, stating they “don't have a lot of time nowadays for time consuming cooking.” This reliance on fast food and pre-packaged meals underscores the challenge students face in balancing their time between academic responsibilities, work, and maintaining a healthy diet.

Students' busy class schedules pose another challenge. An interviewee from interview ten stated that on Mondays and Wednesdays they “have class from 10 until 4 and don't eat that entire time.” Afterward, “all you can get at the dining hall ” at that hour is “ either a burger or pizza” which are neither the healthiest nor most desirable options. This lack of nutritious and convenient food choices during busy academic days further demonstrates the correlation of time constraints and food insecurity among students.

Student athletes face even busier schedules. A student athlete interviewed in interview eleven stated their “days as athletes are really long, and especially with class schedules, it makes it difficult to find times to eat.” The demands of intensive training sessions, team practices, and travel for competitions often leave little room for meal breaks. Additionally, student athletes must prioritize academic commitments alongside their athletic responsibilities, further complicating their schedules. As athletes require proper nutrition to fuel their performance and recovery, the challenge of accessing nutritious food options becomes even more crucial. The struggle to

balance the commitments of being an athlete and the responsibilities of being a student demonstrates how time constraints are connected to food insecurity among college students, particularly among student athletes who have heightened nutritional needs.

In interview twelve, an interviewee stated that the stress of school often influenced their eating habits. They expressed that their heavy class schedule “ highly impacted when and where [they] would eat ” and if they were “ too stressed about classes or homework that was going to be due for the next class [they] wouldn’t really pay attention ” to what they would eat that day. This highlights how academic stress and time constraints worsen food insecurity among college students, as they may prioritize academic success over nutritional needs.

Another interviewee further expressed their busy schedule as a student, emphasizing the limited hours of the dining hall. They mentioned that they “go to school and work until 7,” leaving them occupied during lunchtime, and subsequently having a late dinner. Moreover, they stated that “getting to the dining hall can be hard because it has certain hours” which often do not align with students’ schedules, particularly those taking heavier course loads. This underscores the challenge faced by students in accessing food resources on campus due to time constraints.

Conclusion

Food insecurity among college students is a complex issue that arises from various factors. One of the primary findings of this research is the significant impact of time constraints on food insecurity. Many students, including those working jobs and student athletes with busy schedules, struggle to find time for healthy eating. This challenge is worsened by the fact that cooking nutritious meals requires considerable time and effort, which students cannot often spare due to their academic workload and other responsibilities. Addressing the issue requires a multifaceted approach that takes into account the various challenges students face besides time constraints such as transportation, financial limitations, and academic stress, although all are arguably interconnected.

Do Time Constraints Strain a Student's Time? How Busy College Schedules Contribute to Food Insecurity

by: Sofia Ortega

Introduction

College students are notorious for having many obligations to take up their time. Once young adults are left to their own devices and responsible for their schedules, things never seem to be as organized as possible. Of course, this is not an exclusive event or set of practices, every single college student experience trouble dealing with their schedules and working on time management at least once over their college careers. Especially at a place like the University of Denver where so many students are focused on their studies in hopes of obtaining their degrees, going to grad school, and making the absolute most of their time in college, sometimes sacrifices need to be made in order to get things done. This is a practice that will be true for almost any career or lifestyle a student will choose to pursue, however, getting food and eating meals should not be a thing that is sacrificed.

Food insecurity is a big problem within college campuses, even though it is somewhat of an invisible issue. A very large percentage of students experience food insecurity, whether they deal with not having access to healthy food, not being able to afford food, or even not having the time to buy and eat food, each of these possibilities could be the cause of food insecurity. A problem that can be fixed, and should be fixed, is time constraints causing students to skip meals or not have the time to eat a sufficient meal. Many different things can cause the lack of time that causes a student to be unable to get food such as finding time to get transportation, accommodating the hours of the dining hall and food pantry, and fitting time into a college student's already jampacked schedule of classes and studying time.

Transportation, although not necessarily having an effect on a person's schedule, is always something that a student must factor in when coordinating time to go grocery shopping. For most off-campus students, they do not have as easy access to the dining hall, so they must find a way to get food on their own. By the time a student is an upperclassman, they understand the demands of college life and how they are responsible for their own meals. The interviewee from interview 2 stated that they found it much too difficult to find time to not only grocery shop, but also to cook their food, all before they can finally eat.

“That is because I drive here[school], and I don't have time to get food because I have a lot of class work, so I prioritize that overeating most days, so fast food is the best and easiest way to get a meal in.”

For this specific student, finding transportation is not an issue, but factoring in time it takes to drive to and from school adds on another thing to think about and makes grocery shopping and planning healthier meals seem useless in the grand scheme of things. Although many people would agree that focusing on schoolwork and keeping up with their studies is important, it should not take priority over preparing meals. This student did not seem to be concerned about

how healthy fast food was over a homemade meal and said that their options of fast food were healthy and quick, which made that the optimal choice over an alternative. While it is good that this student was able to successfully find a way to provide for themselves sustainably, every student, no matter their schedule, should be able to have grocery shopping and preparing healthy meals as a viable option instead of it being some dream that is far from attainable. For the interviewee in interview 3, they expressed that they preferred going to the store, but had to find time to get transportation from their peers.

“But, if I, like I don’t know, I got really hungry, and I ate most of it and I wasn’t able to stretch it, that’s kind of where the panic sets in of like, oh, no, I really got to bug my friends to take me to the store. Or, like, I just have to figure out how to adjust my club hours or my work hours so that I can go get food, or things like that.”

The problem in this scenario is not a lack of transportation. DU cannot guarantee transportation to its students, and luckily Denver has a decent amount of public transportation, and this student was able to get transportation from their friends. The biggest problem here is that this student simply does not have the time to go out to the grocery store to buy food on a regular basis. Although the time a student has in their schedule varies based on many different factors, again, time to buy food should not be the first thing that is sacrificed.

Another factor that can negatively affect a student’s ability to find time to get food are the hours of the dining hall and the food pantry. DU is a relatively small community, which is why there is only one dining hall and a very small food pantry. During the interviews conducted for this project, many students were unsure where the food pantry was located or what hours it is open. Although the food pantry is a good resource for students, the lack of communication about the hours that it is open makes it difficult for students to schedule time to go to the food pantry. This is very concerning especially considering students that may really need the resource but are unable to utilize it. The interviewee from interview 3 stated that they use the food pantry often as an alternative to going to the grocery store due to its convenient location, however its hours make it unreliable.

“But I really think it’s just posting when they are open, because sometimes I’ll be like, oh, maybe I’m like not gonna make it till Friday when I can go to the store, and I should go now. And it’s like, oh, it’s Monday, like yeah, I guess then I’m gonna have to like, figure something else out because I have to wait till Tuesday.”

This student lives off campus and knows where the food pantry is and what hours it is open, but they still struggle to schedule time to go because the hours are so limited. Of course, the hours of the food pantry are affected by many different factors such as volunteer availability, food availability, and many other things, but because it is so unknown, it brings up the question of if more people knew about it and had the time to go, would they use this resource. The food pantry is not the only thing that limited availability. Although many upperclassmen are not usually getting food from campus, those that do sometimes struggle with the hours of places on

campus. The interviewee from interview 5 stated that if they are on campus over the weekends, it is virtually impossible for them to find food.

“A lot of places close early or have weird hours or options by the weekend. Does that make sense? Like there aren’t a lot of options to begin with but if I have to be on campus during the weekend I sometimes feel like I have to hunt things down.”

This can make it extra difficult for students who are focused on getting ahead with their schoolwork. Even for students who live on campus, over the weekends the dining hall serves only breakfast and dinner, so if for any reason a student misses out on one of these, they are on their own. Of course, there are C-Stores or vending machines around campus, but those are mostly for snacks. Even something like Einstein’s Bagels on campus is closed over the weekends, which means that for students who are looking for an easy but filling meal, it is much more difficult.

The last, and most important time constraint is simply students’ class schedules. The average workload for a student is 16 credits. Depending on the student’s major, their class schedule may be the biggest hindrance in finding food throughout the day. For the interviewee in interview 12, they stated that between actual classes and time for studying and completing assignments, there was rarely enough time to find food.

“I would say that with a heavy class schedule it highly impacted when and where I would eat and sometimes if I was too stressed about classes or the homework that was going to be due for the next class I wouldn’t really pay attention to when I would eat that day. So yes, most definitely I think scheduling classes has a huge impact around an individual’s eating schedule”

Especially for those who may have late night labs, classes that meet four days a week, or even clubs on top of classes, going to the grocery store isn’t a priority. For some students, meal prepping or stocking up on food once or twice a month works, but many are much too engulfed in their other pursuits that grocery shopping is sacrificed. The interviewee from interview 6 expressed a similar sentiment when asked about if they ever skipped meals.

“Yes, absolutely, because I have class all day, lab, work, so I definitely have skipped a lot of meals in college just because I am very busy, which I need to prioritize food.

At this point, it seems to be that skipping meals is just another college cliché, like eating only microwavable food in your dorm room or relying on fast food too much. Instead, prioritizing meals and healthy eating should become more important to both students and colleges. Of course, it is impossible to make any students follow specific regimens in school, especially the young adults just gaining control of their own lives, but it is also important to acknowledge how unhealthy the schedules of college students are. This is hardly an isolated incident, many students, especially at DU where students are encouraged to participate in clubs, stay ahead in their classes, and gain as much experience as possible.

Conclusion

It is a hard solution to reach, something that would help students with busy schedules and working harder than they ever had in their lives, but something has got to give. When students are juggling so much, there is going to be a breaking point and one of the balls is going to drop. It should be a goal of the university to try as hard as possible to make the environment of DU the one that helps foster student success the most. It should be a priority to teach students how to manage their time in a healthy way even with busy days. Yes, it is very common that students pull all-nighters or spend hours upon hours in the library or have classes from 10 A.M. to 6 P.M. with barely enough break to eat lunch, but for the most part, these are conditions specific to college. Wouldn't it be best for the university to foster environments where anyone and everyone can succeed regardless of their prior time management skills? Shouldn't a prestigious university strive to provide not only the best education possible, but also the best preparation for life after college? Regardless, something needs to change in order to help students prepare for their lives and succeed in all areas.

The Importance of Organisation for Food Health Among College Students

by: Raffaello Papajcik

Introduction

Organisation can be seen as the structured arrangement and coordination of activities, resources, and responsibilities to achieve specific goals efficiently and effectively. Staying organised is a critical skill for all college students, extending further than just the academic and sporting lifestyles that students face on a day-to-day basis. Becoming a student at college is a big step from the lifestyle of being in your family home. The transition is a great leap, and comes with a lot of challenges, including food security. Whilst many students for the first year or two stay on campus, with a readily available canteen for the students living on campus, our research and interviews were specifically targeted towards students living outside of campus who had varying views on the matter of food security.

Being organised is not just about keeping your schedule tidy, but also about creating systems that allow you to support a healthy work-life balance. Being organised can also be extremely difficult if you have certain commitments such as classes, work, and physical activities. This quote below signifies how students feel about the organisational struggles of having to create, plan and prepare for eating healthier foods.

"I have a lot of work and I don't have a lot of time to do it, so making a healthy meal or any meal for that matter would take time out of my day to make and prepare, and then eat it too. So, for this I just eat fast food when I get the chance." (interview 2)

Analysing other interviews, the accessibility of cars had an extreme effect on whether students living off campus were able to organise themselves with food planning as it tremendously impacted their time constraints and eating habits. Another interviewee expressed how difficult it really is to purchase anything from shops like Safeway as it is just too far and expensive. He said,

"I usually shop on Amazon, which is the easiest for me since I don't have a car. You know going to Safeway is just too far. It would take me 30 minutes, maybe even more just to walk there and not even back so it would take me an hour just to go there and back walking. Then you know, then have to spend all the time finding the food and then putting it in a trolley and carrying it back would be a nightmare and Safeway is not even that cheap either. So either I go there or I buy snacks from Conoco which is the gas station just across the road but honestly there's nothing that cheap near campus." (interview 11)

This is the case with many students living off campus with no car or ease of transportation. On the other hand, a couple students who were interviewed that had cars had quite the opposite to say. When asked about whether a car gives them more or different options for food, the

interviewee responded with

"1000%. Just to put it blankly, it's easier to go to fresh markets, easier to go to local farms, and get fresh produce from them when you have a car. It's also easier to get to grocery stores that facilitate a healthier lifestyle, such as Whole Foods, King's Super, and down University Boulevard, that otherwise wouldn't have been accessible in my freshman and sophomore years." (interview 1)

Admitting to the fact that it helps, you can tell from the tones of how this can significantly impact their eating habits, along with simplifying their days of having to be more organised. Addressing the concern of how having a "car definitely was really helpful for getting food" (interview 4) at inconvenient times, their own understanding of greater organisation is also able to "facilitate more healthy lifestyles" (interview 1)

Many students also complained about the opening times of certain sections within the dining hall, saying that some spots during lunch were closed. Experiencing the same thing as a student athlete who lives on campus with the extremely limited time I have to go get food, I often see at the times from 2pm to around 3pm, only the burger, pizza and pasta section is sometimes open, which is simply just not enough variety. Another student living off campus also had to say that "The dining hall has limited hours" (interview 3)

In this very same interview, this student also said that they "have a tree nut allergy" and how "Most of the time, when you come in, you don't even hear from the allergist. I had to seek her out. It was just recommended, like, on whatever DU's onboarding thing was like if you have allergies, go ahead and reach out to her."

A large part of organisation is also understanding what you are going to eat, and the dining hall doesn't really offer anything that good in terms of understanding what they're going to cook the day before. You often just have to walk and see what is there, which is not very useful for students living off campus as they don't know what there is to eat. There is the sodexo app of course, but it is quite literally useless. Furthermore, a lot of students simply "don't have enough time during the day" (interview 6) and combining the organisational aspect whilst "balancing the cost of school, food, housing, and transportation." (interview 6) is certainly a daunting task. The combination of limited time, financial constraints, and the necessity to maintain a healthy diet can overwhelm students, especially those living off-campus. This often forces them to make less healthy choices out of convenience and necessity.

Finally, these students emphasised the continuous struggle to balance a busy schedule while maintaining a healthy diet. One student highlighted the difficulty in staying organised with food choices due to time constraints, resorting to quick, unhealthy options. They said that "Balancing a busy schedule while trying to eat healthy can be incredibly challenging. I often find myself grabbing something quick and unhealthy because I just don't have the time to cook a proper meal. It's a constant struggle to stay organized with my food choices." (interview 7). This constant battle between managing academic responsibilities, extracurricular activities, and food

preparation highlights the broader issue of organisational challenges faced by college students. The inclusion of limited time, financial constraints, and accessibility to healthy food options accumulate, making it clearer to these students about how effective organisation supports the accessibility to bettering their food security both on and off campus.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the importance of organisation in ensuring food security and health among college students are fundamental. The transition from having home meals, to then having a canteen on campus, to transitioning into your very own apartment showcases a significant challenge. From limited time, financial constraints, and accessibility issues often force students to make less healthy food choices, which all seem to be heavily determined under the concept of organisational awareness. Effective organisation, whether that's asking a friend for a ride, or just better preparation of making meals throughout the course of the week can support students in maintaining a healthier lifestyle, ensuring that food security is one less concern in their academic journey. Ultimately, taking some time to support your weeks via organisational skills can contribute significantly to the effectiveness of time use and food security on a day to day basis.

Transportation

by: Greyson Vorgang

Introduction

Transportation and your diet and food go hand and hand. Having a stable and reliable way to get to a grocery store or nutritious places to eat can eliminate students from eating processed and unhealthy meals. Usually, the reason for students not eating a good meal is because they are too busy or just eat what is close around them. I think transportation has a massive influence on what is being put into your body.

With how much college costs today, food plans are often an added financial burden that may go to waste. Eating at college can be tricky and uncomfortable for a couple of reasons. Some students that are athletes find themselves running out of time to eat with classes, practice, workouts and homework. Like this student says:

“I don't really have time while I go home to go and get ingredients to make food, so I just go and get fast food, while I am going home.” (Interview 2)

These students do not have a lot of time to get something nutritious. Other students have trouble eating alone or are embarrassed and don't like to eat in public so they will have something small like ramen noodles in their room. These students lack the nutritious needs to be able to be fully functioning for the whole day, it gets that much harder to get to food places when students make the transition to off campus living. Not eating the right foods can affect your physical and mental health tremendously. But when looking at off campus, going from sophomore to junior year requires more resources and thinking. The biggest resource off campus is transportation. When looking at different interviews and talking to upperclassmen they have said having a car is the biggest part about living off campus. For example, the interviewee said:

“I have a car, which makes the biggest difference. I tried to go to Safeway once during the first year when I was living in halls, and walking back with my groceries annoyed me so much that I never did it again.” (Interview 7)

This is just one example showing that college students with stable transportation are more likely to have better access to foods but are also more likely to be able to make healthier choices. If students had transportation they would be more likely to go to the grocery store and get healthier options but without the transportation it makes it unreasonable, so they have to settle for what they have. For example, this student talks about her shopping experience:

“Denver doesn't have fucking sidewalks. Where am I supposed to push my little cart? So yeah, that is a huge hindrance. Because it's like, oh, okay, I need to take, like, over two hours out of my day, if I really need to walk and go.” (Interview 3)

Also, a vehicle can feel some sort of comfort being able to go whenever and be able to go alone, the interviewee explains her view on the comfortability it attains:

“I mean, one, I can feel comfortable going at any time of day. So, I do some late-night grocery shopping, which I wouldn't necessarily feel as comfortable doing if I was just walking at night.” (Interview 7)

Being able to feel like you can go to the store whenever you want can help with insecurities because going to the store then doesn't seem like such a big deal. Also, I know from personal experiences if it is raining, cold or it is late without a car then students are more likely to eat more processed foods.

This is an example of smaller factors in bigger problems, transportation for food is so important and often determines what food you will be getting. For example, the interviewee says:

“Yeah so obviously when I didn't have my own transportation my food options were a lot more limited to what was nearby and close around me.” (Interview 12)

Without even noticing transportation is a massive part of your diet, being able to pick and choose nutritious options for your meals makes a big difference. For example, this interviewee states:

“When I first came to the University of Denver I did have access to a car, therefore I also had access to healthy food and was able to drive to the grocery stores to get fresh produce or to different food restaurants to order healthy foods.” (Interview 12)

Having a stable transportation system opens up so many more resources in regard to being able to diet well and eat clean.

Conclusion

Overall, when looking at the theme “transportation” in food insecurities or students getting healthy options is vital. I think it is the most important thing when people choose where to eat, the first thing people think is, how far is that? Transportation is how we get there, and it often impacts what kinds of foods are being eaten. Especially when these students live off campus and don't have as much on a meal plan, transportation provides security and comfort to be able to access healthy food when you want throughout the day.

Defining Healthy and Availability

by: Maren Lynch

Introduction

Through analyzing interviews that were conducted with individuals that are juniors or seniors that live off campus but attend the University of Denver as students there is a prevalent connection between how someone views and defines what healthy food is and whether or not they believe the school has been competent in providing that food. A couple of different views were addressed when discussing what factors someone looks at to develop their definition of a healthy meal. Three main themes that came up were limited options for personal preferences, lack of communication to support allergen accommodations and overall access to consistent balanced meals.

While living off campus, many of the students interviewed realistically had to spend most of their days on the campus and traveling between home and school limited the ability to afford going to the grocery store or going out to find specific preferences. As for what students eat on campus, students are doing their best to build healthy meals.

“I don’t know if the dining hall is the healthiest option, but I try my best to make it healthy. I will try to eat a salad with most of my meals there to try to get some balance in.” (Interview 6).

It is illogical to expect the school to cater to every individual's specific preferences but there are ways that the university could seek a better understanding for student needs and expand the variety in the options available on campus. When access to food that people prefer to eat is limited, less students feel comfortable and stable in their food and nutritional intake and have to look for other options.

“if there is something very specific it would just be easier to go off campus to places you know would have what you’re wanting or looking for” (Interview 5).

Going off campus requires more out of pocket money that many cannot afford. Preferences can include the utilization of specific diets of reasons not correlated with a medical condition. This includes groups such as vegetarians or vegans, who feel they have to actively hunt down food options that don’t contain meat or animal products. Many feel the options provided by the dining hall are few and far between with many of the vegetarian options becoming repetitive and not realistic to eat every day. Some of these students have found that, because of their specific personal preferences, the options that are open and available do not provide what they need to eat, and they have to resort to either skipping that meal or spending more money out of pocket to go off campus and get food, which isn’t realistically affordable or a sustainable way to provide food for the human body.

Another food access limitation surrounds the various health and medical restrictions for

an individual. The population of individuals that attend the University of Denver have a vast range of allergies. Once again it isn't necessarily plausible that the university will be able to accommodate to every individual's needs but there are actions that can be taken to make the lives and experiences of the student body easier. One big action brought up in many interviews was expanding and focusing on the communication that is coming from the school and from the Sodexo company. This includes the small signs that outline the meal at each station and the information posted on the everyday app. It was mentioned how these signs are often wrong and do not align with the actual meal that is being provided. The signs also don't provide a clear and detailed account of ingredients or possible exposures that could lead to an allergic or medical reaction.

"An example of this is at a lot of places they use butter in their meals and cheese, and I feel like there should be a better way for all places but especially the dining hall to mitigate that. It's really just more of an annoyance that I have to ask if something has dairy in it when the dining hall could just label things as dairy-free" (Interview 1).

The dining hall does offer one station specifically for people concerned about allergies where dishes are deep cleaned between each student to eliminate any possible allergens. However, the hours for this station are extremely limited and there tends to only be one employee at a time. Also, because it has to be sensitive to allergies students feel like the meals get repetitive and don't always fit the specific preferences of the people who need that resource.

"I just wish the school would be better about labeling, better about reaching out to students, and better about, on their own end, understanding that allergies can kind of kick in at any point." (Interview 3).

Finally, there are many students that focus their definition of health on the balance of the meal and feel like their access to get the balance is limited. These definitions have been developed by how a person was raised and what they were exposed to in their childhood. While everyone's idea of a balanced meal is different there are some basic things to think about that were pretty consistent around what all students had to say. Students mentioned how the access was also limited by hours to get "healthy food".

"And it's like greens is the only one that's like, inherently advertised as, like healthy" (Interview 3).

With that in mind people feel like they are unable to fully get the vegetables and fruits for their nutrition. Other common factors to a balanced meal can be found when there are multiple parts of a dish. This can be constricted when there is different access to food on the weekends or with late night classes. Students will resort to microwavable ramen in a cup or snack like foods when they need food in a time crunch.

"I would say yeah, typically I'm trying my best. Sometimes breakfast is just a granola bar" (Interview 5).

Understanding that students need access to more balanced sustenance that can be used as grab and go is important because a granola bar is not a meal. Students feel like the options that are available for grab and go as well as the food off campus aren't beneficial to balance in their nutritional intake.

"like fast food restaurants around here, um, that are mostly just for people who eat meat and they're very meat heavy diets, which works for me, but not so much for some other people." (Interview 13).

Conclusion

In conclusion the food insecurity on campus can be viewed from a variety of approaches and understanding that everyone has a different definition for what is healthy is super important. Students are asking the university to pay more attention. Attention to allergies, attention to options and attention to hours are three main things students believe to make food more available and make students feel more confident in what they are eating.

Food Accessibility Effects

by: Harper Nelson

Introduction

Many college students struggle with accessibility to food, which can significantly impact their overall well-being and academic performance. Looking at interviews with the students, I see that there is a wide range of opinions on this issue. Some students expressed satisfaction with the availability and quality of food options both on and off campus. However, others highlighted the significant challenges including high cost of healthy food, limited dining options, accessibility to getting to the store, and limited dining hall hours. These obstacles make it difficult for students to maintain a balanced diet, which can affect their health and academic success as well. Here are what some students had to say about their experiences with the accessibility to food as a college student. This is an interview with a junior who does not live on campus,

“Ya so I have a lot of work and I don't have a lot of time to do it, so making a healthy meal or any meal for that matter would take time out of my day to make and prepare, and then eat it too. So, for this I just eat fast food when I get the chance,” (Interview 2).

This student in this quote speaks about their busy schedule, filled with academic work and other commitments, which leaves them with little time to prepare and consume healthy meals. Due to this they typically resort to eating fast food which is quicker and more convenient but is less nutritious. This situation highlights an issue where the demanding nature of college life forces students to prioritize their academic responsibilities over their health. This causes students to be exhausted and with little energy or motivation to cook healthy meals, so they turn to fast food. While in that interview we see students struggling with access to a well-balanced meal we also see some students have no issue finding a balanced meal,

“Yes, I do. I'm able to go to any grocery market, local farm, or fresh food kind of events. I also enjoy going to get fresh produce that is locally made. So, the short answer is yes and I'm very blessed to have that luxury,” (Interview 1).

This student expresses that they have sufficient access to many sources of fresh and healthy food, including grocery markets, local farms, and fresh food events. They describe a variety of options at their disposal where they can get food to make a well-balanced meal. This student also acknowledges their fortunate position in being able to access their resources easily. While this student is privileged to have the time and money to access healthy food other students struggle with their time management for health food. In this next interview we hear from a student athlete who doesn't have as much time on their hands,

“...I do my best to get breakfast and then later in the day, I usually then have dinner. I don't really have lunch because we have training from 12 till 4pm and then normally I have class 4 till 6. So, I find it really difficult to get food but what's lucky as athletes is that we get food from the gym but even that you know isn't healthy and it's

mostly just snacks..." (Interview 11).

Here we look at the healthy food options for athletes. This student describes his busy schedule, with training 12 to 4 and classes from 4 to 6, making it very difficult to maintain a regular meal schedule. This situation points to a lack of accessible mealtimes and options for those with busy schedules. While athletes have access to food at the gym, these options are mostly snacks and not healthy meals. This reflects a broader issue of accessibility to nutritious food, emphasizing that having access to food does not equate to having access to healthy and balanced meals. As an athlete it is very important to maintain their performance and health. Being in season takes away from the time able to cook meals leading to eating out. The same student says,

"Honestly, I've hardly cooked during our season, which started in January and it just ended the other month. I mean, it finished earlier in May. I literally ate out everyday, I didn't have any time to cook food, and honestly living on your own. It can sometimes be cheaper, you know, buying ingredients from the grocery store. Having to cook all these meals can require a lot of different ingredients. And for me, it's just cheaper to go to somewhere like Chipotle and buy a bowl for \$9 You know, and it will fill me up. And sometimes there's even stuff left over I can finish" (Interview 11).

This student speaks about several accessibility issues, particularly concerning time management, financial constraints, and the preparing meals vs eating out. He says while in season he had a very hard time finding time to cook so he'd typically rely on eating out. Living alone exacerbates this issue, as cooking requires purchasing various ingredients, which can be both time-consuming and expensive. The student finds it cheaper to buy meals from places like Chipotle, where a \$9 bowl not only fills them up but often provides leftovers. For him eating out is more cost-effective than cooking at home, which involves buying multiple ingredients that might go to waste. This practical approach to meal planning reflects a balancing act between time, cost, and nutritional needs.

In this next interview I look at a student who has an allergy to tree nuts. They speak on accessibility for people with allergies. She says DU isn't great with accommodating students with allergies,

"...The only response was like, make sure you read the signs. But sometimes the signs aren't always correct, and the app isn't always accurate. So, I mean, it's been thankfully very easy in the sense of like, I have a tree nut allergy, so really just stay away from like, the sweets" (Interview 3).

This student mentions how the inconsistency in information presents a major challenge for individuals with allergies, making it hard to trust the available resources for managing their dietary needs. For someone with a tree nut allergy, this means they must be extra cautious when choosing food within the dining hall. Having this makes the dining hall inaccessible to food sensitive people. On top of inaccessibility for students with food sensitivities, this student also stresses about when she will be about to get her next meal.

“I mean, the dining hall has limited hours to start with. Which I understand, I mean, they're workers, they gotta go home, they have lives too. But I also don't have a car. So, if I run out of food, I go...I try to go weekly,” (Interview 3).

This student mentions the limited dining hall hours, which poses a challenge for those who rely on it for meals. Without a car they must find alternative ways to get groceries. While some dorms do have stores below them, the cost of the items in there are hiked up, making it an undesirable spot to get groceries. Limited dining hall hours and the need to find alternative ways to obtain groceries highlight the importance of considering transportation and meal access when addressing food accessibility issues.

Looking at the 13 interviews conducted by my classmates and myself, one thing I noticed about accessibility is money plays a big role in having access to healthy well balanced meals. The interviews revealed a clear pattern: students who had financial stability were more likely to have easy access to nutritious food options. When I conducted my interview, my interviewee had very easy access to healthy, well balanced meals, but this was only because her friend has a car and an allowance. Having a car is very helpful for students because it allows them to get to the store with no issues. For these types of students time isn't as much of an issue either. This student says, “Yeah, I don't have time sometimes, so I have to order food,” (Interview 9). She talks about how when she doesn't have time she'll spend the extra money to order a healthy meal. Many other students couldn't do this because they don't have the money to budget ordering good healthy food.

Conclusion

The theme of food accessibility among college students highlights significant inequalities. Our interviews revealed that students with financial stability and transportation have easier access to healthy, well-balanced meals, reducing stress. For instance, one student effortlessly accessed fresh food due to having a car and an allowance. While others struggle with high food costs and limited options, which often causes them to resort to less nutritious fast-food options due to their busy schedules. These insights underscore the need for colleges to improve food accessibility to students of all ages. They can do this by offering affordable healthy options, financial support, and accommodating dining hall services. Addressing these issues can help make sure all students have an opportunity to maintain a healthy diet.

Organization

by: Amrit Samra

Overall Being able to stay organized is one of the many challenges that students face experience while studying at the University of Denver. Staying organized as students and getting meals in can be incredibly challenging for many numbers of reasons such as their schedule might not be the best, or they do not know how to plan out their days better, or they might even be missing assignments in classes and make that their priority overeating a healthy meal. This can be like classes can get in the way of being able to get food, or their work might interfere with their time to eat. Being organized helps when times get tough and helps to prevent mistakes in the future, from reading all the interviews it is safe to say that the people that are not organized are not eating healthy foods, or sometimes not eating at all, compared to the people who do plan everything out and are organized. People can do a lot of things to stay organized such as time blocking, meal prep, and even seeking help. In this paper, I will show you the difference between unorganized people and organized people. This second paragraph will talk about organized people and how they can prep meals and eat healthily. The third paragraph will talk about unorganized people and how being unorganized leads them to make unhealthy food choices.

Considering the challenges students face, maintaining an organized schedule emerges as a key skill to succeed in being able to eat healthy foods, and in college in general. Among the challenges, effectively managing a schedule leads to being able to prep meals and eat healthy, which in return helps you pass more classes and get better grades. Through analyzing various interviews, it becomes evident that people with whom prioritize organization are more inclined to maintain healthier dietary habits. Even when people are organized, they will not necessarily try and eat healthy food, but still eat, just like it says from this quote

“ya that is because I drive here, and I do not have time to get food because I have a lot of class work, so I prioritize that overeating most days, so fast food is the best and easiest way to get a meal in,” interview 2.

Here you can see they might not have time to make healthy meals, but since they are organized enough to still get stuff to eat and make sure they are full rather than hungry. As you see in the next quote, he says that he does not have time to make food, so he just gets fast food, which is not the healthiest but better than not eating anything.

“ya so I have a lot of work and I do not have a lot of time to do it, so making a healthy meal or any meal for that matter would take time out of my day to make and prepare, and then eat it too. So, for this I just eat fast food when I get the chance,” interview 2.

Another thing this guy does to eat is buy fast food and put it in the freezer to eat later. This is a perfect example of someone that is organized, as they will go out of their way to still get food. The quote:

“ya so for food I get more food from fast food places, and I keep some in the freezer from when I am hungry and need to eat food but I don't have time, so I just warm it up and eat it, for example I will go to Jimmy Johns and I will get two or three sandwiches and I will eat one and freeze the other two, for tomorrow or the day after,” interview 2.

In the next quote we can see, someone organized could get healthy food. When you are organized, you are more likely to get healthier food. The quote:

“When I first came to the University of Denver I did have access to a car, therefore I also had access to healthy food and was able to drive to the grocery stores to get fresh produce or to different food restaurants to order healthy foods,” interview 12.

As you can see, being organized goes a long way, and makes sure that you are eating regularly instead of just not eating at all. Even having a car can help you get food. If you have a car, you are more likely to be able to get food, and get healthier food, rather than eating at school.

As we can see, organized people eat very healthily and are on top of what they do. Unorganized people often find themselves caught up in a cycle where their lack of organization and even motivation leads to challenging circumstances, particularly when it comes to eating healthy. Without having a clear plan or structure for their days, they may prioritize immediate tasks, such as completing assignments, overeating healthy foods, or even preparing meals. In essence, the absence of organization not only impacts their academic studies but their overall health too. When you are not organized, you are more likely to get into situations where you might not be able to eat food or might not have time too. In the next quote it shows us that unorganized people do not know how to make a good schedule, and therefore end up in bad situations. The quote:

“Yes, because, yes, I go to school and then I work until like 7, so I am busy during lunchtime, and I do not really eat breakfast. And so, I usually just make myself a late dinner. And then, yes, getting to the dining hall can be hard because it has certain hours that... It only has certain hours that it is open, so getting there can be a little bit difficult,” interview 13.

As you can see this person's schedule clearly affects them and makes it so they cannot eat. If this person just sat down and looked at his schedule, they would be able to find times where they can get food in, but instead they just continue with their life not eating. College is stressful and hard, but not eating should never happen, even when you are on a diet or have special accommodation you should still be able to find time to eat. The next quote also says they do not have time to get food. The quote:

“Not really. I really do not have the time to go to, like, food events” interview 3.

As we can see this person does not have time to go places, and therefore it can affect the way you eat, and when you eat. When you are not organized, you will always have trouble getting food, and even more getting healthy food.

Conclusion

Throughout these interviews, you have seen many students talk about their eating habits at the University of Denver. We find that the more organized you are the more likely you are to eat food and eat healthier food too. In conclusion, the trajectory of our dietary habits is intrinsically linked to the degree of organization we cultivate. When organized you will always be able to eat, and when eating you will be able to become a better student as you will have one less thing to worry about.

Student Distrust and Disapproval of the Campus Dining Hall

by: Logan Meyers

Introduction

Food scarcity for University of Denver upperclassmen living off campus is not typically discussed along with other general health concerns in the United States. It's assumed that, because college students typically have access to income of some level, a place to live, and on-campus resources, finding filling and nutritious items to eat isn't a struggle for young twenty-somethings. The truth is far from this ideal, however, with college students generally eating out and also spending as little money as possible with the intention of just getting through the day instead of eating a nutritious meal. Yes, important factors in the decision to eat cheap or get takeout include the high cost of nutritious items as well as the convenience of food prepared by someone else, but it also stems from a consistent dislike, distrust, or inability to access the dining hall. While a meal plan with the dining hall would be the most convenient option for addressing the daily problem of securing food, upperclassmen consistently don't take advantage of the resource.

The dining hall's greatest disadvantage is that, while some might think it's solid, the dining hall has never been the most appealing option for food when compared to fast food nearby or cooking one's own food if they're employing an available recipe. The upperclassmen interviewed in Interview 7, for example, is vegetarian. When asked, they described the available food options in the dining hall as "gross" and "bad especially in dining halls." The interviewee in Interview 1 confirms at one point in their interview that the dining hall is a typical cause of stomach problems for them while Chipotle rarely leads to such a result. The interviewee in Interview 11 avoids the dining hall for a different reason: they prefer the fast food near campus. Specifically, Tacos El Metate, a Mexican restaurant where "they do really good breakfasts for cheap with eggs, potatoes, bacon in like a tortilla wrap, like a burrito. They also do it with a \$1 coffee which is really good for the price in comparison to all the other alternatives on campus haha." The fact that people can taste the difference in quality between the dining hall and fast food, the dining hall can often cause health issues, and the eating facilities are more costly on campus leads upperclassmen to seek other sources of food.

Beyond the fact that the dining hall typically doesn't taste as good as fast food, students also avoid the dining hall because of how little they actually know about it and how little that leads them to trust it. This is not to say that upperclassmen have no faith in the dining hall's selection, but the little information immediately available to everyone leads to skepticism among the upperclassmen population, which is only further spurred on by the fact that the dining hall isn't so essential to said students and thus can be ignored if convenient. On the first page of Interview 2, the interviewer and interviewee discuss healthier options available in the dining hall. The interviewee goes on to list off various fruits as healthy, but fruits are available anywhere, which means that's not a unique feature of the dining hall. In further discussion, the conversation shifts to the unspecified oils used in the cooking process at each food station. "So, I think yes, they're healthier. But also, I mean, like, they are cooked in a dining hall. I have no

idea, like, how much oils they're using or what type...so inherently, we'll never kind of really know, but they definitely have healthy options.” Students with allergies also don't have an immediate understanding of what's served at the dining hall. When asked if health information about the food was properly communicated, the interviewee in Interview 3 replied “No. Oh, my God.” Said interviewee has relevant allergies and needed to directly contact the campus allergist to understand what was safe to eat. Regardless of what's actually in the food cooked in the dining hall or what oil is used, the lack of competent marketing to students leads to less students putting all their trust in the dining hall, which leads to less upperclassmen using it once they no longer have to.

Another factor that leads upperclassmen to use the dining hall less is that the dining hall is an on-campus facility while upperclassmen live off campus. The dining hall is open from seven in the morning until seven thirty at night, but upperclassmen don't typically remain on campus once their classes are over for the day. In other words, DU upperclassmen don't live close enough to take advantage of the dining hall when they're actually hungry. In the case of the interviewee from Interview 6, the grocery store down the street is more convenient. Further perspective on the geographical inconvenience of the dining hall can be seen in Interview 1.

“I wouldn't eat there only because I don't think that their food selection is very good. It's just kind of more of like the convenience when you're like a freshman or sophomore. It's so much easier. But since like, I live off campus with a lot of my friends, it's easier for us truly just to pick up Chipotle, Illegal Pete's, and any kind of restaurant nearby. I tend to think that the quality of food at restaurants especially nearby, like Chipotle being fresh, it's a little bit more, subdued.”

This sentiment is shared amongst numerous upperclassmen like the interviewee in Interview 5, who explains that they “like to cook and grew up cooking,” which is why they themselves cook from home. Not only is the dining hall less convenient, but the food it puts out may also not be as high quality as available restaurants.

Conclusion

The DU dining hall, while more accessible to freshmen and sophomores with little funds unused to living on their own, is one of the many options available to DU upperclassmen. Junior and senior students who often have more money and live off campus typically find they can eat out, purchase groceries to cook in their living space, and that the dining hall, while previously convenient, doesn't have the highest quality food. Beyond differences in taste, the dining hall also isn't immediately transparent with its ingredients and practices, which makes things difficult for students with allergies or curiosity. Finally, the fact that one needs to be on campus to access the dining hall leads upperclassmen to secure food from options closer to home as they no longer live on campus. Lower relative quality, a lack of transparency, and inconvenient location drive DU upperclassmen to sources of food outside of the dining hall.

The Stigma Surrounding Food Insecurity

by: Alexander Lowham Ruzzo

Introduction

The negative attitudes towards food pantry usage are not only external but can also become internalized by those who need the service. People may begin to see themselves through the lens of societal prejudice, believing they are less worthy or capable because they require assistance. This internalized stigma can erode self-esteem and further compound the difficulties faced by individuals in crisis. Using a food pantry is often perceived as a loss of dignity and independence. Many people take great pride in their ability to provide for themselves and their families, and turning to a food pantry can feel like an admission of failure. This perception can be particularly acute in cultures that highly value self-reliance and hard work. “I don't feel like I really need it, plus I don't even know where it is, and from what I have heard from other people the food here at DU is not fresh or good at all” Interview 5.

Recognizing the negative impact of this stigma, many food pantries have taken steps to combat it. These efforts include community education to change perceptions about poverty, ensuring that food pantries are welcoming and non-judgmental environments, and implementing confidential ways for individuals to receive assistance. Some pantries have also started to rebrand themselves as community markets or resource centers to help reduce the associated shame and promote a more positive image.

Increasing awareness of the importance of a balanced diet has led students to seek healthier meal options. Many students are looking for meals that include fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins. They may also want options that are low in sugar, sodium, and unhealthy fats. When cafeterias do not provide these healthier choices, students may feel their nutritional needs are not being met, potentially impacting their overall health and academic performance. A significant number of students have dietary restrictions due to allergies, intolerances, or medical conditions. Common restrictions include gluten-free, dairy-free, nut-free, and soy-free diets. When cafeterias fail to accommodate these needs, affected students can struggle to find safe and suitable meal options, which can be frustrating and potentially dangerous.

“Interviewee: From what I understand, they tried to be accommodating. They tried to, um, have vegetarian options, gluten free options. They were limited, but they were making more efforts to try and accommodate stuff like that. And to try and label, like, allergy warnings, but the labels weren't always on the right dish. So, I would say there's still room to grow in that area.” -Interview 8

A significant number of students have dietary restrictions due to allergies, intolerances, or medical conditions. Common restrictions include gluten-free, dairy-free, nut-free, and soy-free diets. When cafeterias fail to accommodate these needs, affected students can struggle to find safe and suitable meal options, which can be frustrating and potentially dangerous. Students'

wish for more dietary options in their cafeterias highlights the need for schools to adapt to the evolving dietary preferences and requirements of their student body. By offering a wider variety of healthy, inclusive, and culturally appropriate meal options, schools can support the health, well-being, and satisfaction of their students, creating a more inclusive and supportive educational environment.

As students progress to upperclassmen status, they typically gain more independence and responsibility, including making more of their own dietary choices. With this independence comes a greater awareness and appreciation for diverse and high-quality food options. Upperclassmen may be more inclined to seek out meals that reflect their personal tastes, nutritional goals, and ethical beliefs. By the time students reach their junior and senior years, their tastes have often matured, and they may have developed specific preferences and expectations for their meals. They might seek more sophisticated, flavorful, and varied food options that go beyond the basic offerings typically found in school cafeterias. This can include international cuisines, gourmet dishes, and specialty foods that cater to more refined palates.

“Which is like, obviously healthy inherently. But I feel like they at least aim for hearty proteins and grains and, like, a balanced plate. So, I think yes, they're healthier. But also I mean, like, they are cooked in a dining hall. I have no idea, like, how much oils they're using or what type...so inherently, we'll never kind of really know, but they definitely have healthy options.” -Interview 3

Conclusion

While upperclassmen may have more control over their food choices, they are often still limited by practical and financial constraints. Offering a variety of affordable and convenient food options on campus can alleviate the financial burden and logistical challenges of finding suitable meals off-campus. Meal plans that include diverse and high-quality options can be particularly beneficial. Upperclassmen's wish for more diverse and tailored food options reflects their growing independence, refined tastes, and varied dietary needs. By offering a wider range of nutritious, convenient, and culturally relevant meals, schools can better support the health, well-being, and satisfaction of their upperclassmen, fostering a more inclusive and engaging campus Environment.

Synthesis of Findings

The students in ANTH 2424: The Social Determination of Health class used thematic analysis to analyze the interviews and find the most prominent themes, highlighting quotes from several interviews to show an understanding students' perceptions, opinions, and experiences surrounding food insecurity on DU's campus. Interviewees brought many issues to light, such as the lack of dietary accommodations for students with allergies and students needing religious and cultural accommodations, accessibility to ingredient knowledge, inadequate dining hall operating hours, frustration with how the C-Store is operated as well as its hours of operation, and consistent problems with Sodexo's Everyday app. Our study also found that there is an overall lack of awareness on DU's campus about the food pantry and details associated with it. Students also reported a lack of meal planning and budgeting knowledge. College is a big adjustment for most students, especially regarding their access to food.

Cultural and religious accommodations for students with these dietary restrictions posed challenges for some students as well. For example, a Muslim student expressed difficulty finding a meal on campus during Ramadan that accommodated their dietary needs. On this day DU made public statements expressing "Happy Ramadan" but failed to apply that thinking towards the needs of those who celebrate Ramadan. Students with dietary restrictions also found their food difficult to eat at times, and depending on when they could get a meal, the available options were often undesirable and lacking in quality and nutrients.

Students aware of DU's food pantry reported hardly using it because of its limited hours of operation; for Spring Quarter 2024, the hours of operation were Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2pm-6pm. Interviewees also discussed the negative stigma associated with food pantries as places of 'last resort' and also reported feeling like someone else needs that resource more than they do. Additionally, interviewees reported the location of the food pantry as problematic as it is located in the basement of the Driscoll Commons which is out of the way for many students and makes students feel uncomfortable going to the location.

The hours of the dining hall conflict with students' schedules, as classes are often scheduled during mealtimes. Additionally, the dining hall closes too early for students with late classes, making it so these students do not have a chance to get a meal. First and second year students are required to have a meal plan, meaning the dining hall should be a reliable food source that has nutritional options available for students. Interviewees reported difficulty getting a balanced meal at the dining hall. Students seeking options for food outside of their meal plan noted that there are limited options for purchasing food close to campus which is frustrating for students without reliable transportation or transportation in general. Students find it difficult to buy groceries and those without jobs have limited resources and struggle to find food options outside of their meal plan. The lack of transportation makes students walk a significant distance to and from the nearest grocery store. Students have said that the distance is far enough to question if they will make the trip at all. If they make the trip, they must travel back with all their purchased groceries, which makes grocery shopping more difficult for those without

transportation. Even though DU students have an RTD pass for the academic year, transporting groceries on the bus or the train is not ideal and can be challenging. The weather also impacts the capability of trips to grocery stores, whether that be heavy snowfall or dangerously hot temperatures. Weather can also be a factor in students' decision to go to the dining hall as it is a significant distance from some of the on-campus housing options.

The on-campus option for groceries outside of the meal plan—other than the food pantry itself—the C-Store, is not affordable—students reported high cost of foods—and a lack in nutritional value. During this study, moldy strawberries were found at the C-Store. Students also find it frustrating that the store closes even though there are no working staff at the location. The fact that there are no working staff at the C-Stores concerns students about the maintenance of the stores.

The main findings of our exploratory study coincide with larger findings in other research studies focusing on food insecurity on college campuses, including the interconnectedness of food insecurity to factors such as financial barriers, a lack of time for cooking and eating, and that food insecurity is both a health and social issue (Zigmont et al 2021).

Recommendations

Our findings coincide with recommendations found in other research studies focusing on food insecurity on college campuses. These recommendations include increased access to healthy and fresh foods, healthier options in dining halls, better food pantry hours, dorm-friendly options in the food pantry, easier access to groceries through more reliable transportation, a desire for more affordable foods on campus, extending dining hall hours, extending hours of the C-Store (Corner Stores, located in Nelson Hall and Centennial Halls), and education on life skills such as time management, cooking, and meal planning. The dining hall, C-store, and food pantry all need better hours that allow for students to adequately plan around getting food from them. Regarding the C-Store hours specifically, having the C-Store open 24/7 would allow students to have access at their convenience rather than closing the store at midnight. A shuttle to nearby grocery stores or a program that incentivizes grocery delivery to campus dorms and residences would also be beneficial to students. Interviewees also recommend DU offer meal planning, budgeting, and cooking programs for students.

The food pantry should be rebranded and relocated to promote people using the resource. Changing the name of the food pantry and moving the location to a more inviting and accessible space would be beneficial to students. Additionally, food quality and diversity in options should always be a priority to allow the most amount of people to enjoy the food options on campus. Being able to enjoy the food is as important as diversity in food options. If people do not enjoy the food or have difficulty eating it because of the lack in quality and nutritional value, then there was no point in offering the food in the first place.

Nutritional labels for food both in person at the dining hall and on the Everyday app need to be adequately updated and represent as much information as possible about the food. This way, students can know of any allergens and if they should stay away from any of the food for dietary reasons. An on-campus dietitian to help with accommodation and dietary needs should be available to students, rather than having the dietitian employed through Sodexo. The university should look after every food need rather than delegating these responsibilities to Sodexo. An interviewee shared that the Sodexo dietitian said there were too many restrictions they were giving them, and they would not be able to accommodate them. Any and all accommodations should be addressed with the utmost seriousness.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Group Project Interview Guide: Food Insecurity at DU

Assignment: You will conduct an interview with an individual that fits the criteria based on your group's target demographic and ask questions about food insecurity on DU's campus. The interview should be approximately 30 min long and you should focus on using probing techniques to get information. Use the prompted questions below as a guide; not all questions have to be answered as long as you use good probing techniques. You must record the interview and turn it into a transcription using your preferred transcription method. Edit the transcript to differentiate between interviewee and interviewer responses. Use 'interviewee' instead of the person's real name so they remain anonymous. Have both parties sign the consent form and return those to your TA.

DUE DATE: The transcript is due on May 24th, if you turn the transcript in by May 10th you will receive 5 extra credit points.

Questions:

- Do you have access to healthy food? Or proper food/allergy accommodations?
- Do you find yourself stressed about where your next meal will come from?
 - Do you have your own transportation?
- Do you use the DU food pantry?
- How has your food access changed since your 1st & 2nd years at DU?
 - Does your schedule impact your access to food?
 - Do you have kitchen access?
- How can DU do better?

Appendix B: Signed Consent for Course-Related Research Project



SIGNED CONSENT FOR COURSE-RELATED RESEARCH PROJECT

Would you like to be involved in a classroom research project at the University of Denver?

I am Alejandro Cerón from the Department of Anthropology and I invite you to participate in my course-related research project entitled *Understanding Students' Perceptions about Student Food Insecurity at DU's Campus*. This research is being conducted as a classroom project in ANTH 2424 The Social Determination of Health.

Your participation is completely voluntary so you don't have to answer any question, and you can stop at any time. If you do choose to participate and then change your mind, you won't be penalized in any way.

Please read this document and ask me any questions that you may have BEFORE agreeing to take part in my research.

What is the purpose of this course-related research project? The purpose of this project is to understand students' perceptions and opinions about student food insecurity on the University of Denver campus.

How many participants will be in this project? About 32 people will participate, including DU's students.

What will I be asked to do? If you agree to be in this research, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview that asks your views about food insecurity among college students at DU. If you accept to participate, the interview will be audio recorded. The audio will be transcribed within one week and the audio will be destroyed. We will not record any information that could identify you because we will treat your participation and the transcript as confidential. We will write a report that aggregates the results of the 32 interviews.

How long will this take? Your participation will take about 30 minutes.

What are the risks and/or benefits if I participate? There are no risks and no benefits to you from participating in this research.

Will I be compensated for participating? You will not be reimbursed for your time and participation in this research.

Who will see my information? In reports presented in class or within the university, there will be no information included that will make it possible to identify you. We will write a report that aggregates the results of the 32 interviews. The results of this study will not be published or presented outside of the university. Research records will be stored securely and only approved researchers will have access to the records. The instructor of our course may inspect and/or copy your research records for quality assurance and data analysis.

Do I have to participate? No. If you do not participate, you will not be penalized or lose benefits or services unrelated to the research. If you decide to participate, you don't have to answer any question and can stop participating at any time.



Who do I contact with questions, concerns or complaints? If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, concerns, or complaints about the research and wish to talk to someone other than individuals on the research team or if you cannot reach the research team, you may contact the instructor of the course that is sponsoring this project: Alejandro.CeronValdes@du.edu, or (206)427-1284.

You will be given a copy of this document for your records.

By providing information to the researcher(s), I am agreeing to participate in this research.

Participant Signature	Print Name	Date
Signature of Student Researcher Obtaining Consent	Print Name	Date