



**FOOD 4**

**HAWKS**

**STUDENT FOOD INSECURITY  
AT WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY**

**A 'FOOD 4 HAWKS' RESEARCH STUDY**

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

“In times like these, I think reaching more individuals on different levels where they are able to access the services that can help them is essential. The Food Bank in the Students’ Union regularly helps people with food insecurity and there should be more reach and more funding towards this and other initiatives like it.”

- WLU Student, anonymous

Student food insecurity is a systemic problem at Canadian universities. There is limited research, however, on the extent and experiences of food insecurity among post-secondary students (Silverthorn, 2016). The existing research that has been conducted on the issue has shown that rates of food insecurity among post-secondary students are as high as triple the national average, ranging from 28.3 percent to 46 percent, depending on the institution and the measurement instruments (Sheridan, 2017; Ents et al., 2017; Silverthorn, 2016; Moscato, 2016). Understanding the factors driving student food insecurity requires an analysis of multiple and intersecting stressors. Food insecurity is often influenced by income, employment, geographical location, and other systemic inequalities such as gender, race, and ability. Most notable among these common stressors is the increasing financial burden faced by post-secondary students in Canada (Farahbakhsh et. al., 2015; Nugent, 2011; Cummings, 2015; Silverthorn, 2016).

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the depth and breadth of these common stressors on university campuses. With widespread layoffs, reduced work hours, the inability to work due to public health restrictions, mental strain and social isolation, post-secondary students are facing new or worsened challenges. This experience among students reflects the broader state of rising food insecurity rates across Canada as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Statistics Canada, 2020).

This report details findings from an online survey conducted with Graduate and Undergraduate students at Wilfrid Laurier University (Laurier) in September 2020. The report examines the state of student food insecurity at WLU and explores a variety of factors influencing student relationships with food. The pervasiveness of hunger and food insecurity at Canadian universities along with the short- and long-term negative health, social, and educational outcomes serves as the justification for this study. Furthermore, this study

contributes to emerging research on food insecurity at Canadian post-secondary institutions by examining the extent of, and factors related to, student food insecurity at WLU. Given the ongoing financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on students, this research contends that there is an immediate need to understand the extent and experiences of student food insecurity at WLU and proposes to use this knowledge to inform current and future evidence-based food programming on campus. A key component of the Laurier Strategy: 2019-2024 is to support and facilitate a thriving community by enriching partnerships for the purpose of building inclusivity. Food has the power to bring people together, and the knowledge produced by this study aims to build partnerships within the WLU and broader community to collectively address a growing and urgent need among the student population. This report is the first step towards forthcoming conversations with students, staff, faculty and other key stakeholders who continue to support the development of a healthy and inclusive food environment for our students.

## 2.0 BACKGROUND

“food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”

(FAO, 2006)



### 2.1 DEFINING FOOD INSECURITY

Food insecurity is a complex and dynamic concept that invites many definitions in both scholarship and practice (Simon, 2012). The most utilized and accepted definition, however, is used by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The FAO defines that, “food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO, 2006). Similarly, the Government of Canada defines food insecurity as “the inability to acquire or consume an adequate diet quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so” (Government of Canada, 2020). Both of these definitions have embedded within them a number of key dimensions of food security: food access, food utilization, food stability, and food availability. All four dimensions must be met for individuals to be considered food secure. This study operationalizes these dimensions of food insecurity while also considering other areas such as food justice, food literacy, and food culture. All of these terms are defined in Table 1 below.

**Table 1:**

DIMENSIONS OF FOOD SECURITY	DEFINITION
Food Availability	When individuals have access to sufficient quantities of food, which have high nutritional quality. The use of the term sufficient food reflects the amount of food available within a community (FAO, 2006; Simon, 2012).
Food Accessibility	When individuals have financial, physical and socio-cultural accessibility to food (Simon, 2012).
Food Utilization	Utilization refers to all elements related to use, including food safety, food education and the processing and preparing of food (Simon, 2012).
Food Stability	When individuals have adequate food at all periods of time. Chronic food insecurity exists during long periods where an individual has the inability to meet minimum food requirements while transitory food insecurity exists during short time periods causing a temporary food deficit (FAO, 2006).
Food Justice	Working to dismantle systemic forms of oppression that exist in our food system and to empower those most affected by inequitable systems (FoodShare, 2019).
Food Literacy	A set of attributes including food and nutrition knowledge, food skills, and confidence in food choices. Food literacy contributes to enabling people to make good decisions to support their health (Perry et al., 2017).
Food Culture	The practices, attitudes, and beliefs as well as the networks and institutions surrounding the production, distribution and consumption of food (Almerico, 2014).



## 2.2 CANADIAN STUDENT FOOD SECURITY STUDIES

Post-secondary students in Canada are under-evaluated in food security studies and literature. The most consistent food security data available to the public is through the federal government’s Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), which although offered every two years, does not evaluate food security every cycle (Canadian Government, 2012). These surveys utilize the Household Food Security Survey Module (HFSSM) to capture food insecurity rates and to report on demographic statistics, including gender, age group and ethnicity but not on post-secondary students. According to the CCHS, the age demographic of 18-34 is the most food insecure age category (Canadian Government, 2012). Similar to the federal government, provincial and territorial governments do not release food security data on students. The lack of widespread, consistent and long-term data specific to student food insecurity has resulted in a significant gap in our knowledge about the issue and our capacity to develop evidence-based food programming on campuses. In a mixed-methods study exploring experiences of food insecurity among undergraduate student at the University of Waterloo, Maynard et al. highlighted the consequences of this data gap, arguing that “Canadian post-secondary students are vulnerable to food insecurity, yet lack of examination of this issue has prevented identification of policy and program solutions” (Maynard et al, 2018, pg. 1).

Despite the lack of government data, studies have been conducted across Canada by university professors, students, outside researchers and non-profit organizations:

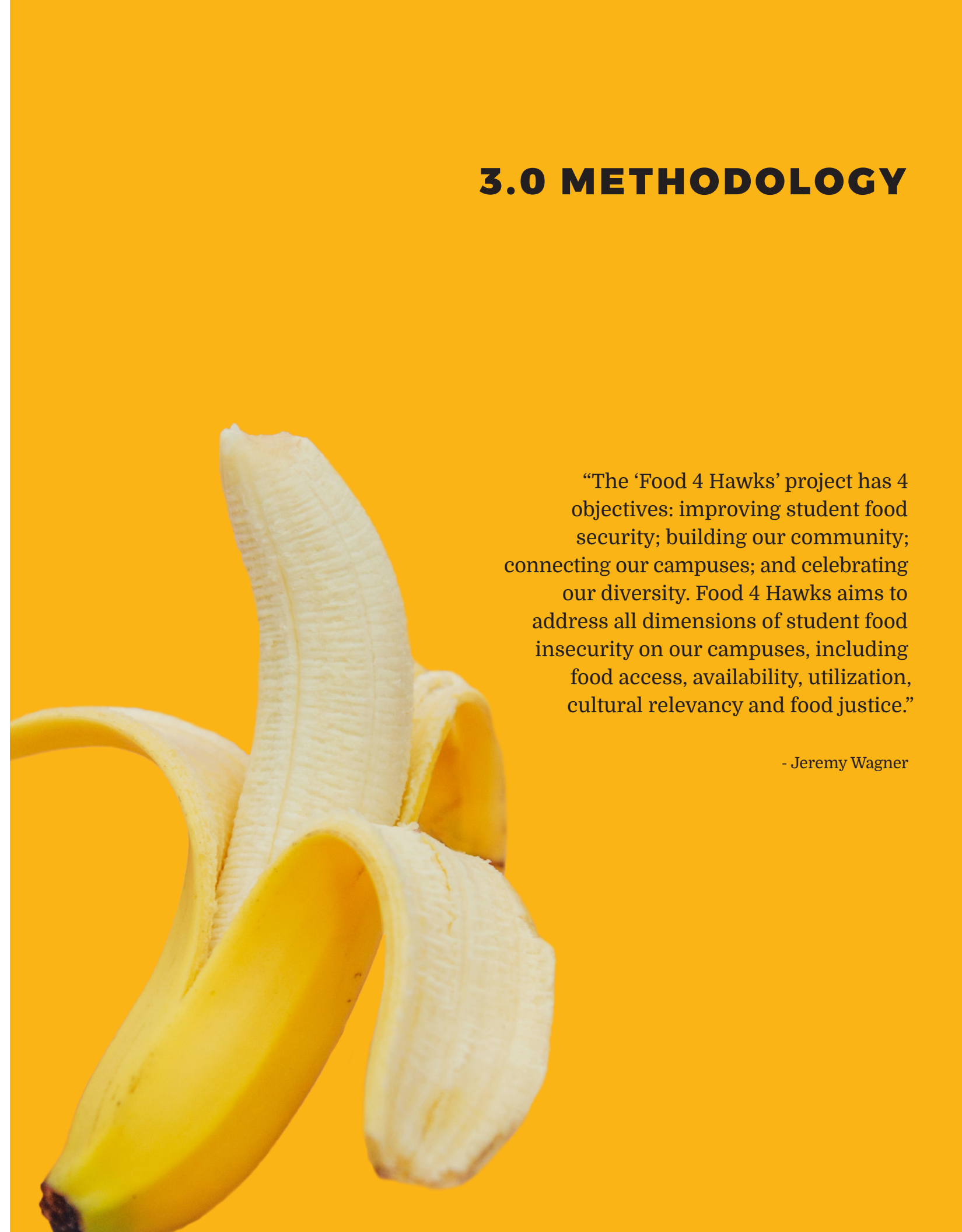
**Table 2: Summaries of Canadian Student Food Security Studies**

STUDY	SUMMARY
Sheridan, 2017 University of Saskatchewan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used modified HFSSM</li> <li>• 6% of students were surveyed</li> <li>• 9.9% of students were food insecure to some degree</li> </ul>
Ents et al., 2017 University of Manitoba	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used modified HFSSM</li> <li>• 35.3% of students were food insecure, with 23.5% being moderately food insecure and 11.8% severely food insecure</li> <li>• 20% of all students and 70% of food insecure participants identified food costs as the primary barrier to food, with limited time being the second largest barrier</li> </ul>
Silverthorn, 2016 Dalhousie University, Lakehead University, Ryerson University, Brock University and the University of Calgary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used modified HFSSM</li> <li>• Between the 5 universities, the average rate of student food insecurity was 39%.</li> <li>• Over 50% of students identified that their primary barrier to accessing food was the cost of food, with tuition fees being the second largest barrier</li> </ul>
Moscato, 2016 Acadia University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used modified HFSSM</li> <li>• 38.1% of students were food insecure, with 49.5% of students living off-campus being food insecure</li> <li>• Higher rates of food insecurity amongst younger students and those paying for their own education</li> <li>• Statistically significant findings surrounding the connection between stress levels, physical and mental health, and grades with food insecurity</li> </ul>

## 3.0 METHODOLOGY

“The ‘Food 4 Hawks’ project has 4 objectives: improving student food security; building our community; connecting our campuses; and celebrating our diversity. Food 4 Hawks aims to address all dimensions of student food insecurity on our campuses, including food access, availability, utilization, cultural relevancy and food justice.”

- Jeremy Wagner



This study utilizes a cross-sectional design and analyzes the student population at WLU at a single point in time (September 2020). An online survey was conducted through the Qualtrics platform. The participants of this study were all WLU students, regardless of program or level of study. Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants for this study, as they were selected based on their availability and willingness to engage. Throughout the month of September 2020, students were encouraged through GSA, WLUSU, and WLU social media platforms, the WLU web page, and MyLearningSpace to participate in the study. No incentives were used to encourage participation. Overall, 856 students participated in the survey, which is approximately 4.3% of the student population.

The study uses a standardized food security measurement tool that has been adapted from the HFSSM to be used at the level of the individual. This metric is used and supported by the Canadian federal government and has been selected for the purposes of this study to ensure comparability across other food security studies conducted in Canada (summarized in section 2.2). The HFSSM has two sets of questions, with one designed for adults and the other designed for children. This study uses the set designed for adults and is comprised of ten questions. The food security status of an individual student is calculated from the number of affirmative answers given.

**Table 3: Food Security Scale for Adults According to the HFSSM**

FOOD SECURITY STATUS	NUMBER OF RESPONSES
Food Secure	0 affirmative answers
Mildly Food Insecure	1 affirmative answer
Moderately Food Insecure	2-5 affirmative answers
Severely Food Insecure	≥6 affirmative answers

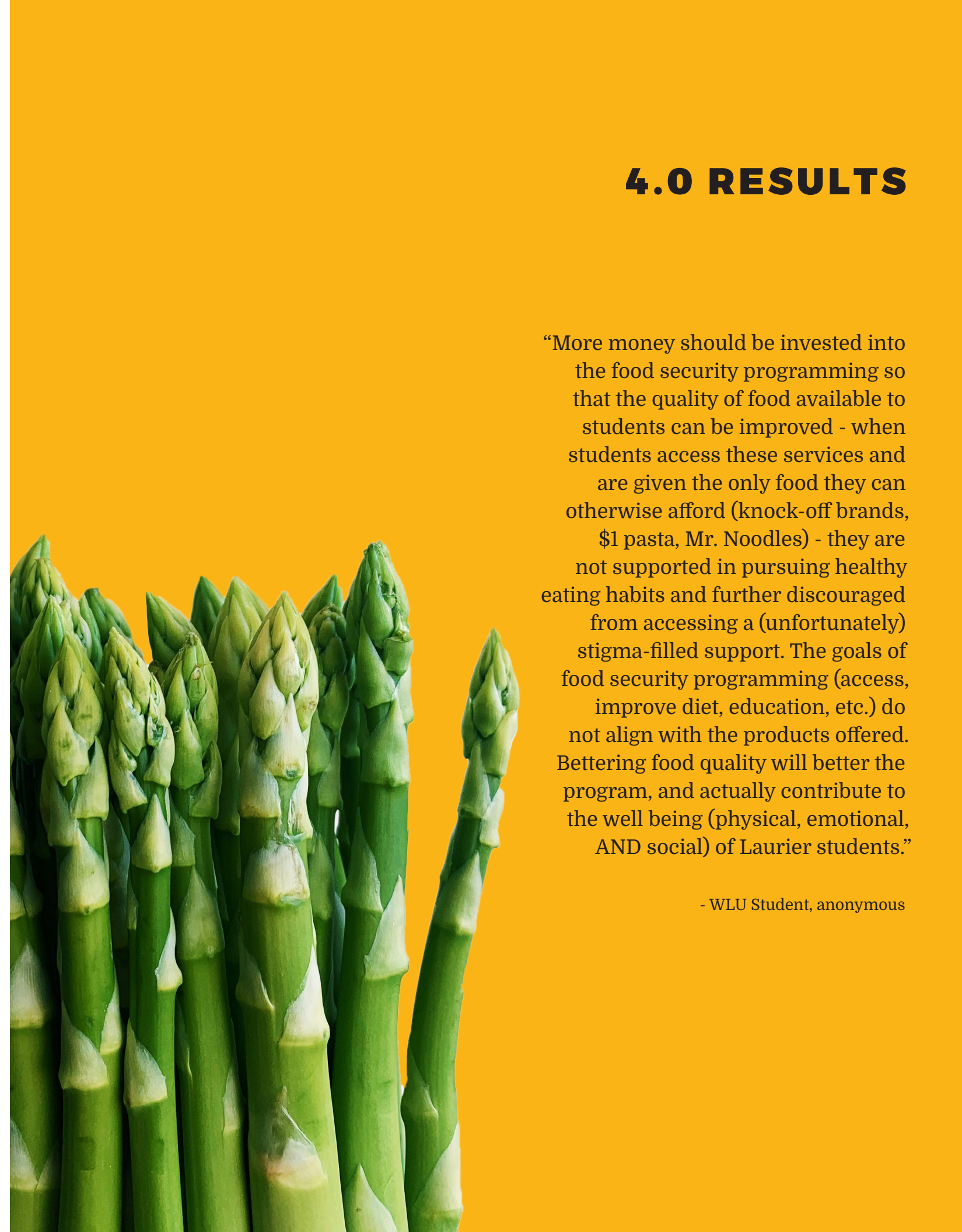
*(Government of Canada, 2012)*

The first section of the survey collects information on general student demographic information. Section two of the survey uses the adapted HFSSM to determine student food security status and examines the extent to which student food security experiences have changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Section three of the survey examines variables that might be impacting student food insecurity, such as transportation and proximity to food retailing, financial and time related constraints, and the cultural significance of accessible food. The final section of the survey explores awareness, usage, and stigma around two central food security support programs available to students at WLU (The Food Bank and the Dollars and Sense program).

## 4.0 RESULTS

“More money should be invested into the food security programming so that the quality of food available to students can be improved - when students access these services and are given the only food they can otherwise afford (knock-off brands, \$1 pasta, Mr. Noodles) - they are not supported in pursuing healthy eating habits and further discouraged from accessing a (unfortunately) stigma-filled support. The goals of food security programming (access, improve diet, education, etc.) do not align with the products offered. Bettering food quality will better the program, and actually contribute to the well being (physical, emotional, AND social) of Laurier students.”

- WLU Student, anonymous





## 4.1 STUDENT DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

756 Undergraduate students and 88 Graduate students participated in the study (Table 4).

**Table 4: Student Level of Study**

LEVEL OF STUDY	# OF STUDENT RESPONDENTS
Undergraduate	756
Graduate	88
Masters*	78
PhD*	10
Total	<b>844</b>

The most common faculties that students belonged to were the Faculty of Science (235), the Faculty of Arts (223), and the Lazaridis School of Business and Economics (176) (Table 5).

**Table 5: Faculty of Study**

FACULTY OF STUDY	# OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS
Faculty of Arts	223
Faculty of Education	13
Faculty of Human and Social Sciences	70
Faculty of Liberal Arts	38
Faculty of Music	38
Faculty of Science	235
Interdisciplinary	5
Lazaridis School of Business and Economics	176
Lyle S. Hallman Faculty of Social Work	37
Martin Luther University College	2
School of International Policy and Governance	2
Total	<b>839</b>

**89% of Laurier students are enrolled in Undergraduate studies, while 11% are enrolled in Graduate Studies.**

(Fall Registrar's Report, 2020)

**Enrollment Percentage By Faculty:**  
**Faculty of Arts 24%**  
**Faculty of Arts Education 1%**  
**Human & Social Sciences 10%**  
**Liberal Arts 3%**  
**Music 3%**  
**Science 30%**  
**Social Work 4%**  
**International Policy < 1%**  
**Lazaridis 23%**  
**Luther 1%**

(Fall Registrar's Report, 2020)

Laurier is a multi-campus university, with the majority of students either enrolled at the Waterloo (16,000) or Brantford (3,000) campus. The University also has a Toronto location that offers part-time alternate weekend programs for the Lazaridis School, a Kitchener location where the Lyle S. Hallman Faculty of Social Work program is housed, and a site in Milton. There are significant differences in the size of each campus/ location and the food environments of the cities in which they are located. This study represents students' experiences with food insecurity across all Laurier campuses and locations, with 672 students enrolled at the Waterloo campus and 147 from Brantford participating in the study (Table 6). 9 students from the Toronto location, 18 students from the Kitchener location, and one student completing studies through offerings from the Milton site also participated in the study.

**Table 6: Location of Campus Enrollment**

LOCATION OF ENROLLMENT	# OF STUDENT RESPONDENTS
Brantford	147
Kitchener	18
Milton	1
Toronto	9
Waterloo	672
Total	<b>847</b>

A majority of students who participated in the study identify as female (604), while 224 identify as male and 12 identify as non-binary (Table 7).

**Table 7: Gender Identity**

GENDER	# OF STUDENT RESPONDENTS
Female	604
Male	224
Other	12
Prefer not to say	8
Total	<b>848</b>

**Enrollment Percentage By Location:**  
**Brantford 13%**  
**Kitchener 3%**  
**Milton < 1%**  
**Toronto 1%**  
**Waterloo 79%**  
**Online 4%**

(Fall Registrar's Report, 2020)

**“You shouldn't have to choose tampons over food.” 38% of Laurier students and staff struggle to afford the menstrual care products they need. For non-binary and trans folks, it's upwards of 75%.**

(LSPiRG Menstrual Equity Campaign, 2019)

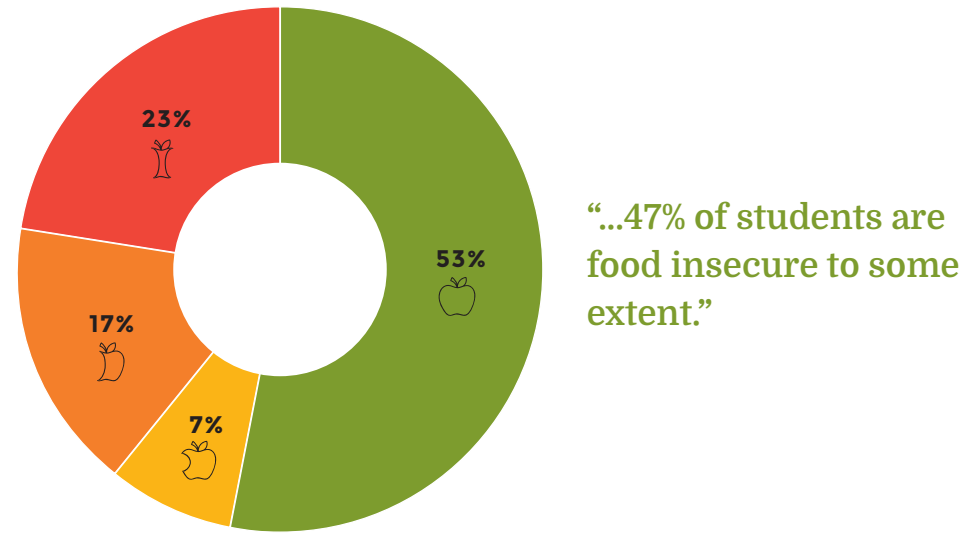


## 4.2 STUDENT FOOD SECURITY STATUS

### 4.2.1 STUDENT FOOD SECURITY STATUS

Using the modified HFSSM, the study found that 47% of students are food insecure to some extent (Figure 1). 23% of students are severely food insecure while 17% are moderately food insecure. Just over half of students (53%) are food secure.

Figure 1: Student Food Security Status



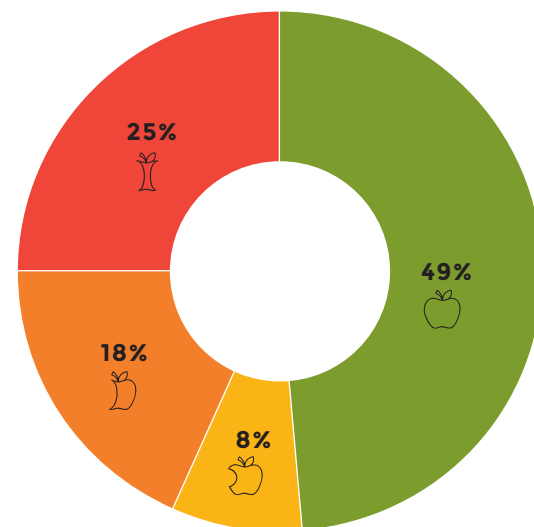
#### LEGEND



### 4.2.2 STUDENT FOOD SECURITY STATUS BASED ON LEVEL OF STUDY

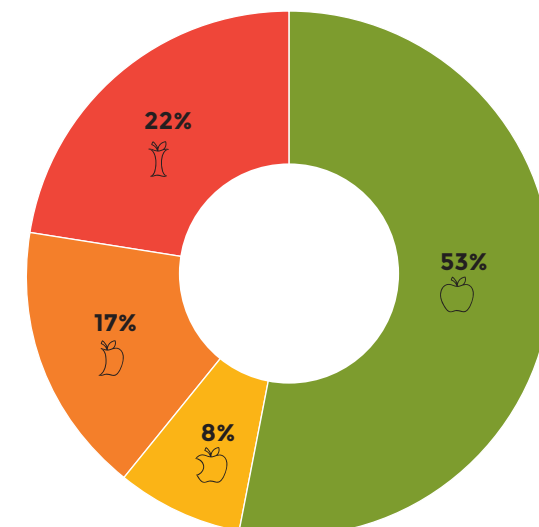
Of the graduate student population at WLU, 51% are food insecure to some extent, which is 4% higher than rates of food insecurity among all students (Figure 2). 25% of graduate students are severely food insecure while 18% are moderately food insecure. Just under half of Graduate students (49%) are food secure.

Figure 2: Graduate Student Food Insecurity



Of the Undergraduate student population, 47% are food insecure to some extent, which is a lower rate than among Graduate students (Figure 3). 22% of Undergraduate students are severely food insecure while 17% are moderately food insecure. Just over half of Undergraduate students (53%) are food secure.

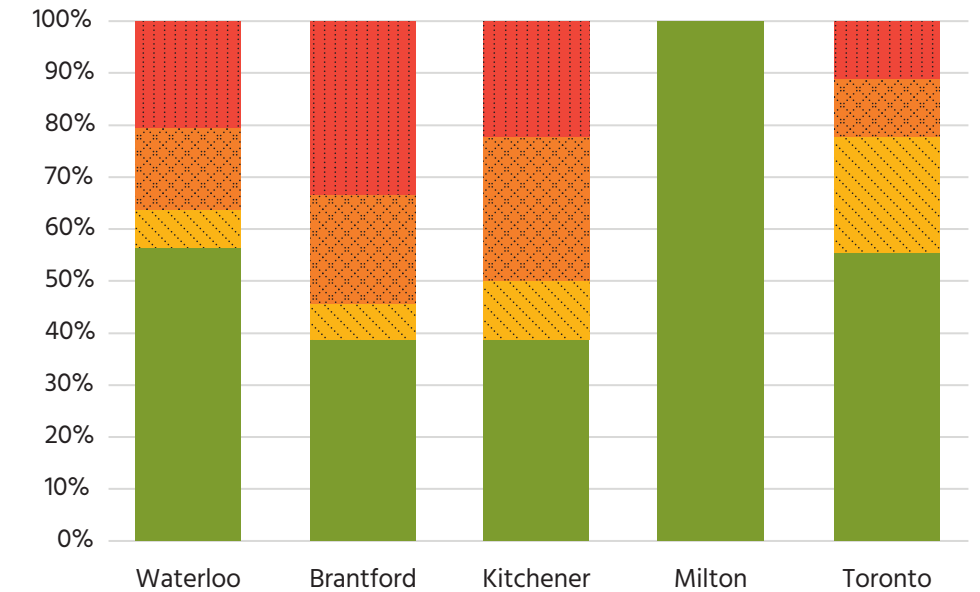
Figure 3: Undergraduate Student Food Insecurity



### 4.2.3 STUDENT FOOD SECURITY STATUS AND CAMPUS LOCATION

There is significant variation in rates of student food insecurity across Laurier locations (Figure 4). 33.3% of students enrolled on the Brantford campus are severely food insecure while 21% are moderately food insecure. 61% of Brantford students are food insecure to some extent. These rates of food insecurity are significantly higher than among students enrolled on the Waterloo campus, where 20% of students are severely food insecure and 16% are moderately food insecure. The rate of severe food insecurity among Kitchener students (22%) is also higher when compared with the Waterloo campus. Only one student from the Toronto campus (11%) reported being severely food insecure.

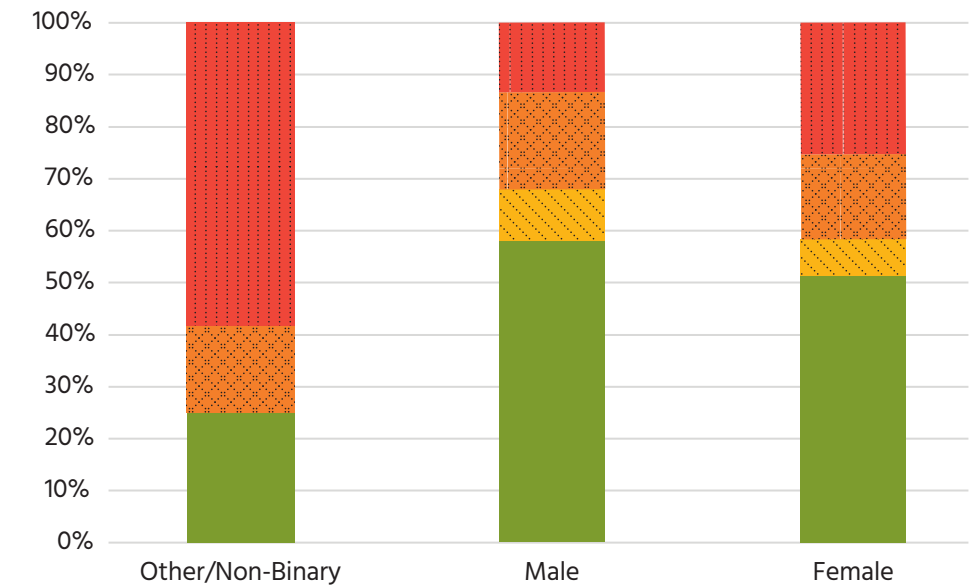
Figure 4: Student Food Security and Campus Location



### 4.2.4 STUDENT FOOD SECURITY STATUS AND GENDER

When disaggregating food insecurity rates based on gender identity, clear inequalities emerge (Figure 5). 58% of students who identify as non-binary are severely food insecure, while only 13% of students identifying as male are severely food insecure. Food insecurity rates among female students is also considerably higher, with 25% being severely food insecure. Figure 5 suggests that there is a significant inequality in food security status between non-binary folks, females, and males.

Figure 5: Student Food Security Status and Gender



#### LEGEND

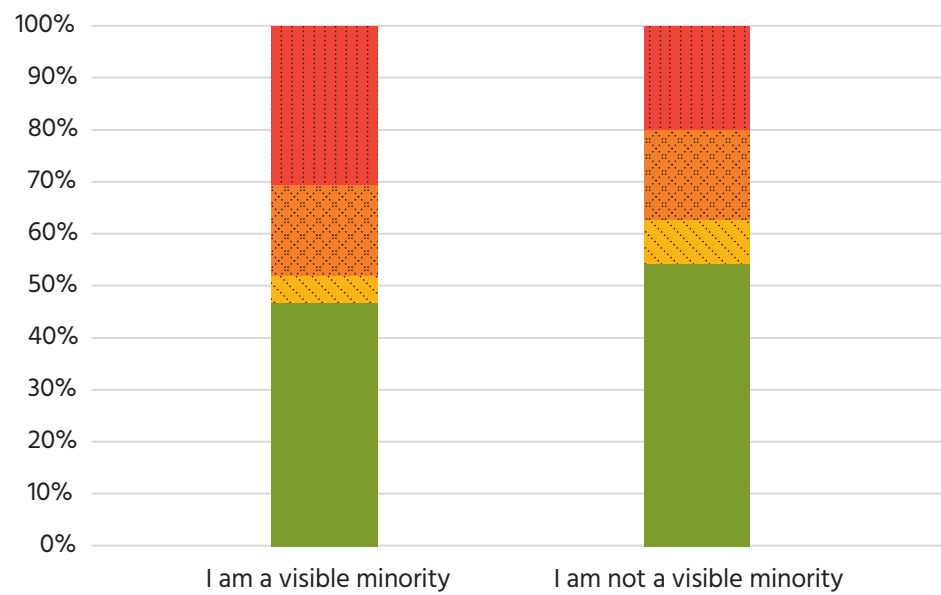




#### 4.2.5 STUDENT FOOD SECURITY STATUS AND VISIBLE MINORITIES

Rates of severe food insecurity differ between those who identify as a visible minority and those who do not (Figure 6). 52% of students who identify as a visible minority experience food insecurity to some extent while 30% reported being severely food insecure. For those who do not identify as a visible minority, 46% experience food insecurity to some extent while 20% experience severe food insecurity. Figure 6 indicates that there is significant inequality in food security status between those who identify as a minority and those who do not.

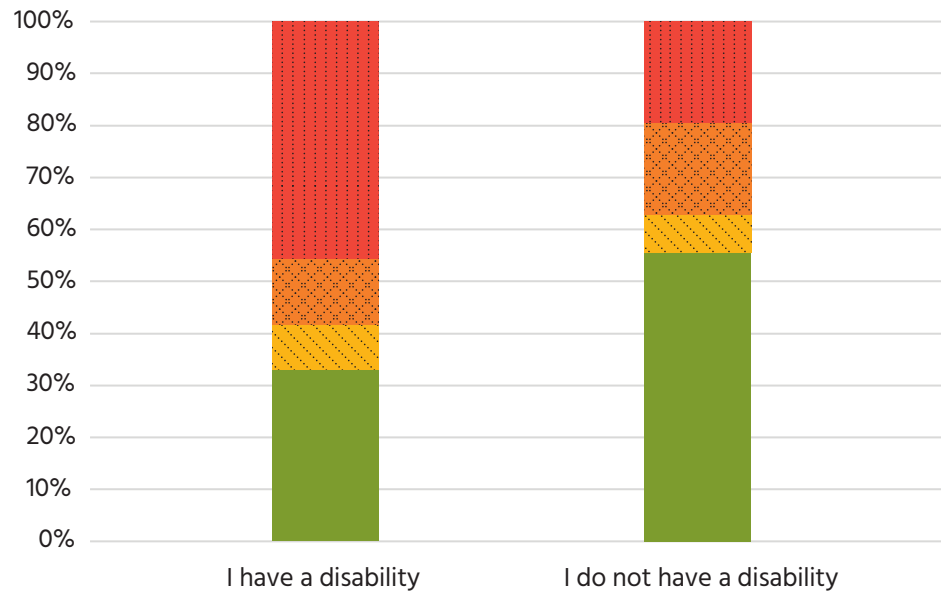
**Figure 6: Student Food Security Status and Visible Minorities**



#### 4.2.6 STUDENT FOOD SECURITY STATUS AND DISABILITY

Students who identify as having a disability are significantly more likely to experience food insecurity (Figure 7). 46% of students with a disability are severely food insecure, whereas 19% of students without a disability are severely food insecure.

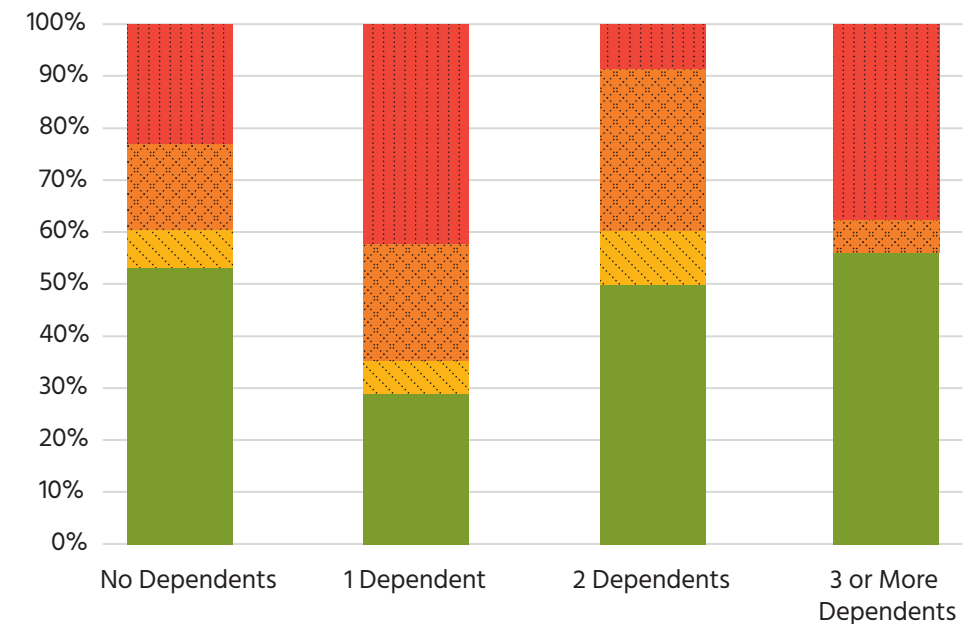
**Figure 7: Student Food Security Status and Disability**



#### 4.2.7 STUDENT FOOD SECURITY STATUS AND HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS

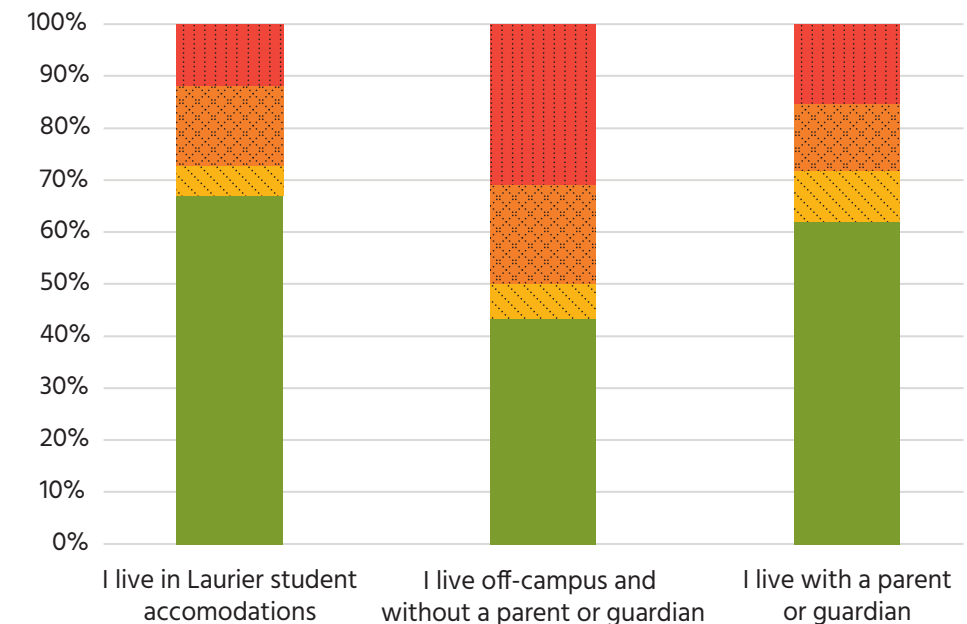
Students with dependents are more likely to be severely food insecure than those without dependents (Figure 8). 23% of students without dependents are severely food insecure, while 41% of students with one dependent are severely food insecure. Students with three or more dependents also have higher rates of severe food insecurity (38%).

**Figure 8: Student Food Security Status and Number of Dependents**



Rates of food insecurity also differ depending on living situation (Figure 9). 31% of students living off-campus and without a parent or guardian are severely food insecure while 15% of those living with a parent or guardian are severely food insecure. Students living in Laurier student accommodations are much less likely to be food insecure, with only 12% being severely food insecure.

**Figure 9: Student Food Security Status and Living Situation**



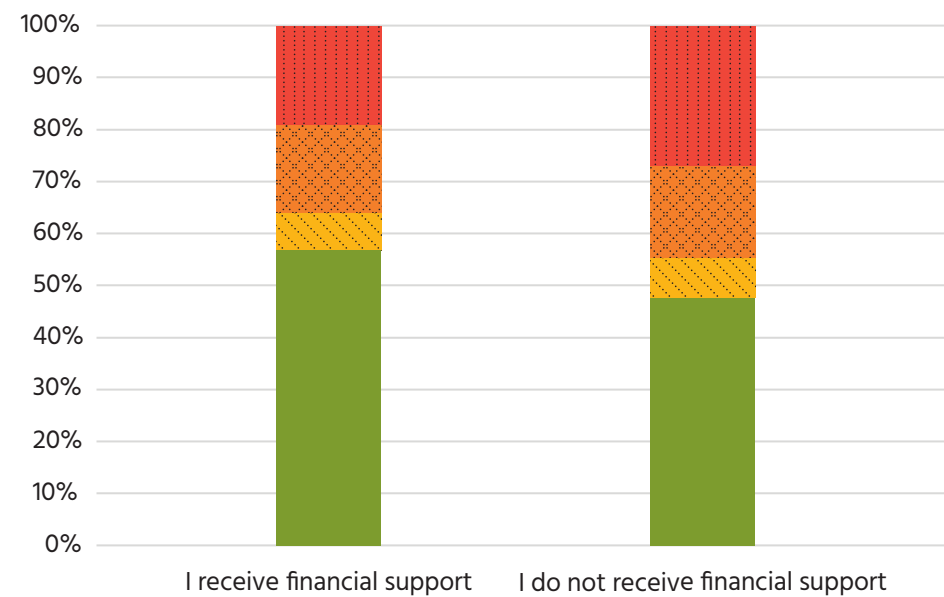
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- Food Secure
- Marginally Food Insecure
- Moderately Food Insecure
- Severely Food Insecure

#### 4.2.8 STUDENT FOOD SECURITY STATUS AND FINANCIAL SITUATION

Students who receive financial support, whether through scholarships, grants, teaching assistantships or friends and family, are less likely to be food insecure than those who do not (Figure 10). 19% of students who receive financial support at severely food insecure whereas 26% of those who do not receive financial support are severely food insecure.

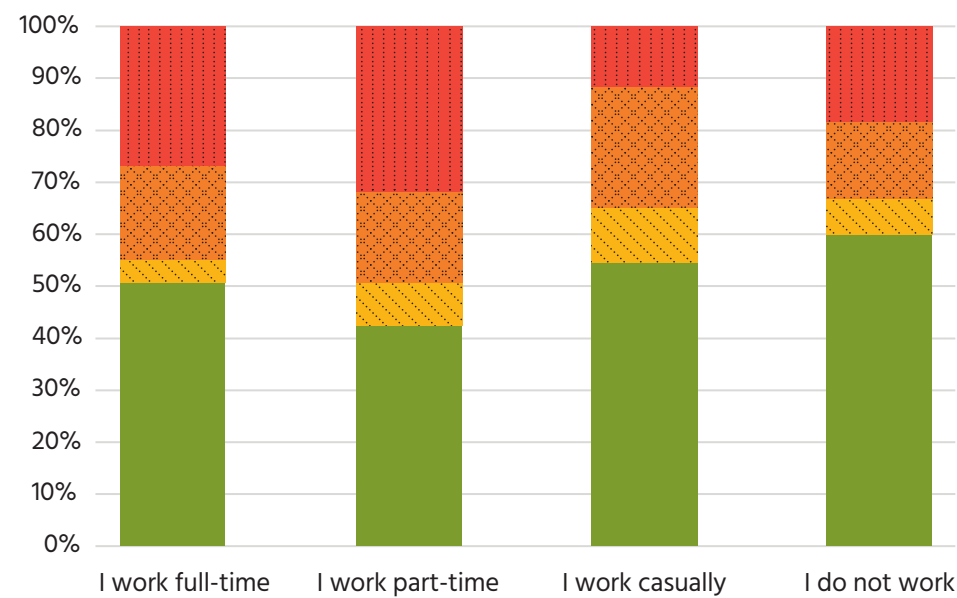
**Figure 10: Student Food Security Status and Financial Support**



\* "Financial support" refers to scholarships, grants, teaching assistantships, and support from friends and family

Students that work are more often food insecure than those who do not (Figure 11). 27% of students that work full-time are severely food insecure and 32% of those that work part-time are severely food insecure. These rates are much higher when compared to those who work casually (12%) or do not work at all (18%).

**Figure 11: Student Food Security Status and Employment**

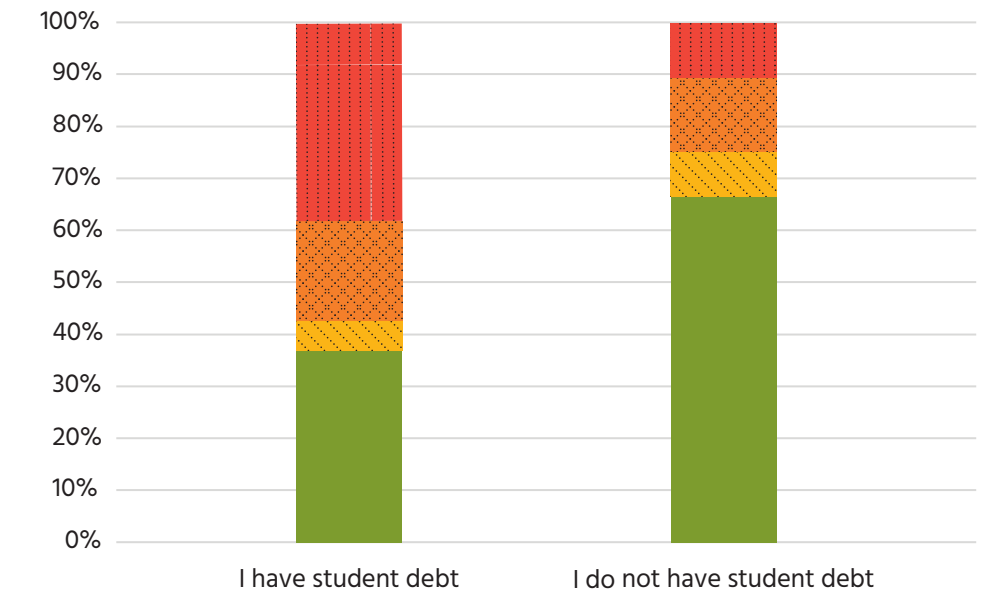


**LEGEND**



Dramatic differences in food security rates emerge when comparing students with debt to those without (Figure 12). 38% of students with student debt are severely food insecure while only 10% of students without debt report being severely food insecure.

**Figure 12: Student Food Security Status and Debt**



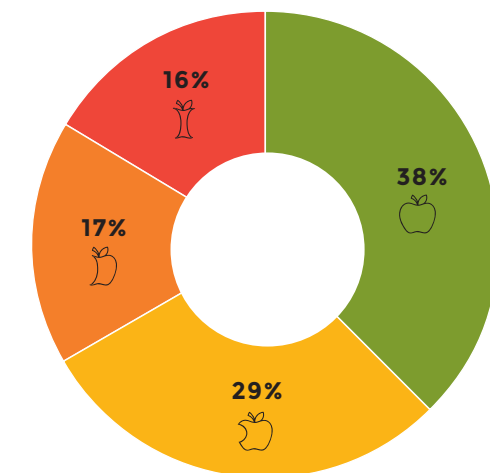
**“Approximately 65% of Laurier students carry OSAP debt to support their studies.”**

- Laurier Financial Aid Office

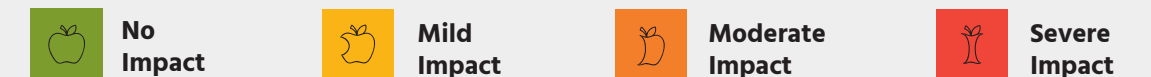
#### 4.2.9 PERCEIVED IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON A HEALTHY AND BALANCED DIET

The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted most students' ability to access a healthy and balanced diet (Figure 13). 62% of students reported there being some negative impact, with 16% being severely impacted and 17% moderately impacted. A minority of students (38%) reported that the pandemic has not had an impact on their ability to access a healthy and balanced diet.

**Figure 13: Negative Impact of COVID-19 on a Healthy and Balanced Diet**



**LEGEND**





### 4.3 INDICATORS OF STUDENT FOOD SECURITY STATUS

Table 8 presents 14 indicators that impact student food insecurity, some of which have more significant findings than others. For instance, 50.7% of students either “sometimes” or “never” have time to shop for food. Similarly, 57.9% of students either “sometimes” or “never” have time to prepare food. 39.1% of students reported to either “always” or “very often” buy the cheapest food available even though they knew it was not the healthiest

option while 20.0% reported that they “always” or “very often” spend less money on food so they could socialize with others. 39.8% of students also reported to either “sometimes” or “never” make decisions that support a healthy and balanced diet. Regarding cultural relevancy, 23.4% of students either “sometimes” or “never” have access to culturally relevant food.

**Table 8: Indicators of Student Food Security Status**

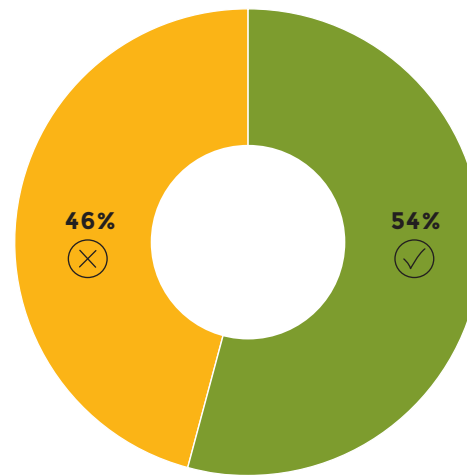
INDICATORS OF FOOD INSECURITY	FREQUENCY OF EXPERIENCE				N value and %
	Always	Very Often	Sometimes	Never	
I have time to shop for food	97 15.0%	219 34.1%	307 47.7%	20 3.0%	643 100%
I have time to prepare food	67 10.4%	203 31.7%	344 53.8%	26 4.1%	640 100%
I have access to reliable transportation to shop for food	268 41.7%	127 19.8%	182 28.3%	66 10.2%	643 100%
Food retailing locations are accessible to me	331 51.6%	181 28.2%	100 15.6%	29 4.5%	641 100%
I have access to culturally appropriate and significant food	320 49.8%	172 26.8%	107 16.7%	43 6.7%	642 100%
I have had to choose between paying for food or paying bills	19 3.0%	36 5.6%	135 21.1%	449 70.3%	639 100%
I have had to choose between paying for food or costs related to my education	30 4.7%	58 9.0%	116 18.1%	438 68.2%	642 100%
I have bought the cheapest food available even though I knew it was not the healthiest option	91 14.2%	160 24.9%	249 38.8%	142 22.1%	642 100%
I spent less money on food so I could socialize with others	27 4.2%	101 15.8%	220 34.3%	293 45.7%	641 100%
I have access to facilities to cook and store food	490 76.4%	84 13.1%	37 5.8%	30 4.7%	641 100%
I have access to clean water	564 87.9%	45 7.0%	13 2.0%	20 3.1%	642 100%
I have the skills needed to cook healthy meals	354 55.1%	161 25.1%	95 14.8%	32 5.0%	642 100%
I make decisions that support a healthy and balanced diet	136 21.2%	250 39.0%	223 34.8%	32 5.0%	641 100%
I have access to fresh and healthy food	270 42.1%	230 35.8%	124 19.3%	18 2.8%	642 100%

### 4.4 AWARENESS AND USAGE OF FOOD AND FINANCIAL SERVICES FOR STUDENTS

#### 4.4.1 FOOD BANK AWARENESS AND USAGE

Figure 14 shows that 46% of students at Laurier are not aware that there is a food bank available for them to use. The food bank is a Students’ union service with communications primarily directed at Undergraduate students.

**Figure 14: Awareness of Food Bank Services**



#### LEGEND

- ✔ Yes
- ✘ No

### FOOD RESOURCES

#### INTERNAL RESOURCES

**Students’ Union Food Bank**  
<https://yourstudentsunion.ca/service/food-bank/>

#### EXTERNAL RESOURCES

**Feed Ontario - Find a Food Bank**  
<https://feedontario.ca/need-help/find-a-food-bank/>

**Food banks and referrals**  
<https://211ontario.ca/211-topics/food/food-banks-and-referrals/>

**Food Banks Canada - Find a Food Bank**  
<https://www.foodbankscanada.ca/utility-pages/find-a-food-bank.aspx>

**The Salvation Army - Food Banks & Practical Assistance**  
<https://salvationarmy.ca/locator/>

**Second Harvest - Agencies**  
<https://secondharvest.ca/who-we-are/agencies/>

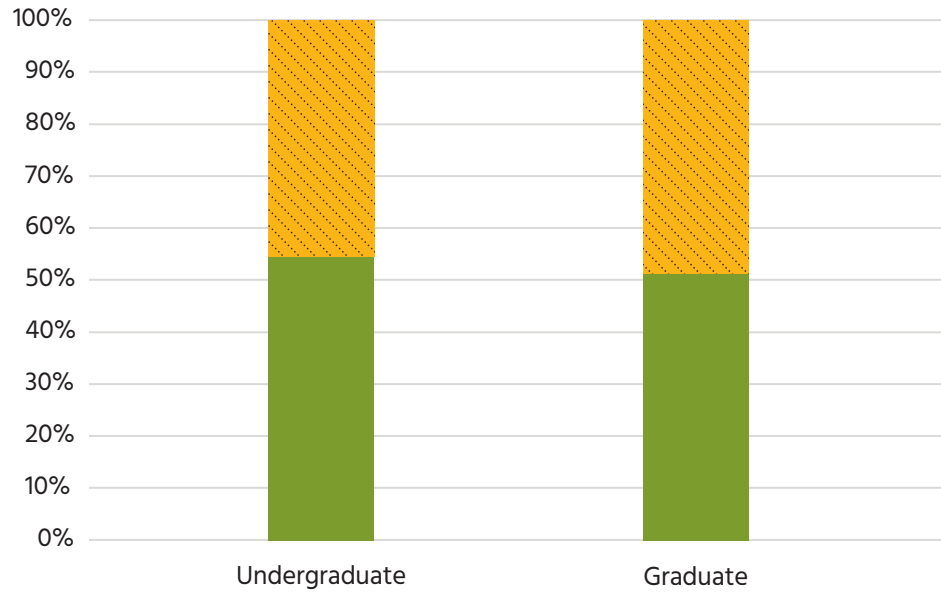
**Meals on Wheels**  
<https://www.mealsonwheels.ca/>  
 416-256-3010 | 1-800-267-OCSA | info@ocsa.on.ca

“I genuinely had no idea half of these services were offered... some people could really benefit from knowing there is help and support out there.”

- WLU Student, anonymous

Awareness of Food Bank services is similar between Undergraduate and Graduate students. 45% of Undergraduate students and 49% of Graduate students are not aware of the Food Bank services available to them.

**Figure 15: Awareness of Food Bank Services and Level of Study**

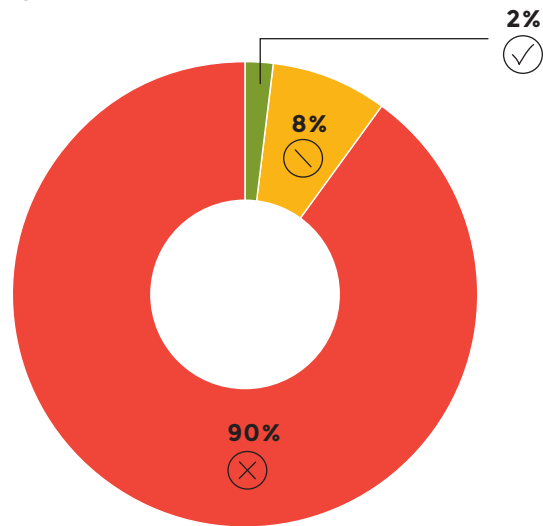


**LEGEND**

- I am aware
- I am not aware

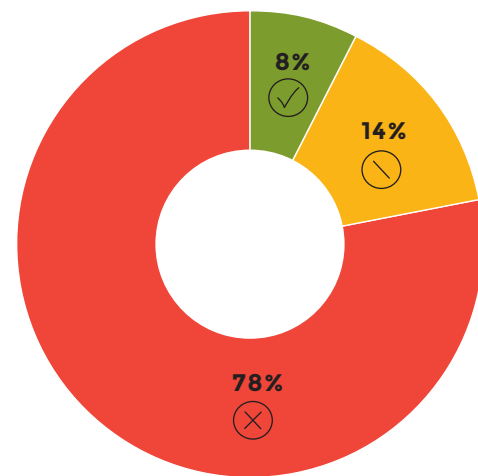
With regard to usage, 3% of all students use the food bank often while 8% use it sometimes (figure 16).

**Figure 16: Usage of Food Bank Services Amongst All Students**



Among those who are severely food insecure, 8% use the food bank often while 14% use it sometimes (Figure 17). Said differently, 78% of students who are severely food insecure never use the food bank.

**Figure 17: Usage of Food Bank Services Amongst Students who are Severely Food Insecure**



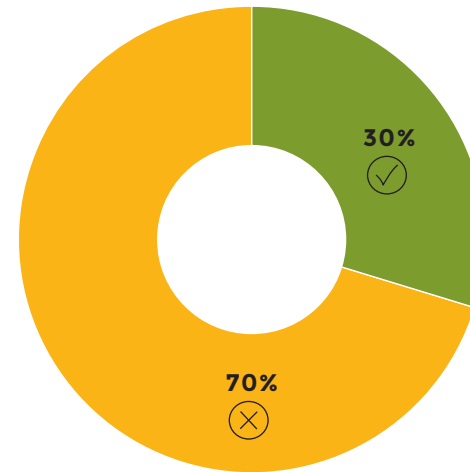
**LEGEND**

- ✓ Often
- ⊘ Sometimes
- ✗ Never

**4.4.2 AWARENESS AND USAGE OF 'MONEY AND SENSE' SUPPORT SERVICES**

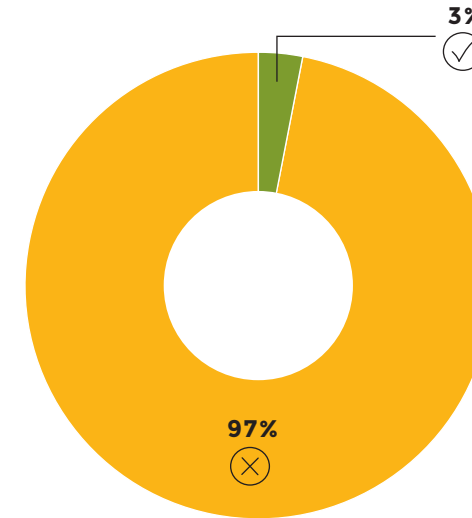
Figure 18 shows that 70% of students at WLU are not aware of the 'Dollars and Sense' program available to them.

**Figure 18: Awareness of 'Dollars and Sense' Support Services**



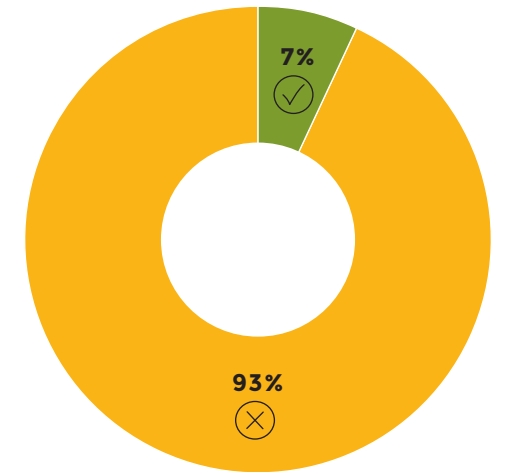
With regard to usage, only 3% of all students have used the 'Dollars and Sense' program (figure 19).

**Figure 19: Usage of 'Dollars and Sense' Support Services Amongst All Students**



Of those who are severely food insecure, only 7% have used the 'Dollars and Sense' program (Figure 20).

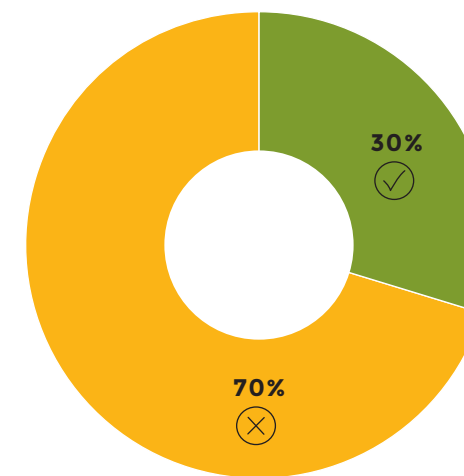
**Figure 20: Usage of 'Dollars and Sense' Support Services Amongst Students who are Severely Food Insecure**



**4.4.3 PERCEIVED STIGMA OR SHAME WHEN ACCESSING FOOD RELATED SUPPORT SERVICES**

Figure 21 demonstrates that stigma or shame is a major reason deterring students from accessing food support services. 30% of all students perceive stigma or shame when wanting to access food related support services available to them.

**Figure 21: Perceived Stigma or Shame When Accessing Food Related Support Services**



"I've never heard of [the foodbank], and if I did I would probably be too embarrassed to go there."

- WLU Student, anonymous

**LEGEND**

- ✓ Yes
- ✗ No



## 4.5 STUDENT FEEDBACK ON HOW TO IMPROVE FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMMING

The survey instrument asked students about their thoughts on how WLU could improve food security programming. The following section details thematic findings from this question.

### 4.5.1 AWARENESS

Students widely support an effort to raise awareness around the issue of student food insecurity and the support services available to address the issue. Many students reported never knowing about the Food Bank or other food related support programming and emphasized a need to make information about these services more accessible. One student shared that they “genuinely had no idea half of the services were offered” and “some people could really benefit from knowing there is help and support out there”. Another student said, “I didn’t even know about it and I have a 4 year old” and that “I would love to use these services...”. Another student suggested we need to “educate [students] more in their first year about these resources as [they] developed an eating disorder 4 years ago from stress relating to school and not having [their] dietary accommodations met at the dining hall”.

There were also multiple students who knew about some of the food related support programming available but were unclear about how to access it. “I know there is help available, but I’m not sure what the steps are (if any) if I needed to get food”. This finding suggests that, moving forward, awareness and promotional strategies not only need to inform students that services exist, but also how to access them. Last, students also suggested that support services should continue to be accessible to students even though they are unable to visit campus due to the pandemic. “We still need to eat and it can be difficult to afford healthy food”. Many reported not knowing about any of the programming available because they are new to Laurier and have not yet been able to visit campus and that “more advertising for services may help”.

Examples of awareness campaign graphics that are underway:



### 4.5.2 ACCESS TO HEALTHIER FOOD

Many students expressed concern about access to and availability of healthy foods both on and off campus. Most comments were regarding the type and amount of food available at the food bank or the healthy food options from retailers on campus.

Regarding the food bank, one student said, “I did volunteer with the food bank and they do not give much food or a balanced diet a lot of snacks and high sugar and sodium foods are given.” Many others noted similar concerns, such as the food bank providing primarily canned and preserved goods with little fresh fruit and vegetables available for students. “Some students have kids that need more formula or baby food or elderly that need some other food that are not offer in the food bank”. Another student raised concerns about dietary restrictions: “I have diabetes and [Irritable bowel syndrome], so when I tried to access the food bank, I found that the available choices did not cater for someone like me at all. I know that the food is donated therefore you cannot control what’s being offered but I wish the choices included diabetes friendly foodstuffs.” Others raised concerns about the portion sizes available: “food bank portions have been cut back – I can only feed my family of 2 for approximately 2 days.” Students also suggested that the food bank change its 3-parcel policy because it does not meet their needs.

Regarding the food retailers on campus, “there are numerous eateries on campus that could have healthier options on their menus. The pricing of those menus is also often very high (even the dining hall is expensive, especially if you cannot afford the initial cost of the various package deals).” One student noted that unhealthy food options on campus are less expensive than healthy options and suggested addressing this issue.

As a factor of accessibility, affordability was a major concern for students. One student recommended “reducing costs of food services on campus; students are already paying tuition/fees for their education and food should not have to be a luxury.” Another student noted, “I don’t think it should be about providing food help. I think the costs of attending university full time should be manageable enough for someone to attend university and have enough money to eat properly.” One student noted that affordability is different when you have dependents. We need to “recognize that our student population is broad, some are supporting dependents, and food security goes beyond the student themselves and includes their dependents.”

Many students suggested that there should be a home delivery service that accommodates all dietary needs and preferences. “Offering meal subscription boxes/packages which can be delivered directly to an apartment/dorm and that accommodate all dietary needs/preferences. Similar to the Hello Fresh food service, these packages would come with all the ingredients (portioned) and detailed instructions for one to prepare consistently healthy, balanced meals.”

**“Professional Development for program coordinators will be critical to the success of future projects to address food security at Laurier. The Graduate Students’ Association has enrolled our Veritas Café management team in ‘Field to Fork: Introduction to Local and Global Food Systems’ and ‘Food Security and Food Justice in Canada’ courses.”**

- Ellen Menage,  
GSA Executive Director

**“The Students’ Union commitment to addressing food insecurity on campus includes practical tips for healthy eating on a budget, and regular evaluations of our program offerings. Students may now request a parcel up to 5 times a term, and the Food Bank is exploring strategies to also provide fresh food.”**

- The Food Bank Team





#### 4.5.3 STIGMA AND SHAME

Stigma around accessing food related support services was a common concern for students. One student stated, “I’ve never heard of [the foodbank], and if I did I would probably be too embarrassed to go there”. Another student said, “Students who need these services are affected by the stigma of getting support from the food bank... I once ate almost nothing but Tim Hortons and Subway for months on end because I was too busy to leave the science building and too tired to cook once I got home, so the times I ate best were sneaking into events with fruit and veggie trays and pretending I was supposed to be there”.

While students raised concerns about stigma and shame when accessing services, they also provided recommendations for how to address the issue. “Make it seem more of a casual thing. At first, I thought the Food Bank was for only the few who needed it, rather than any student who wants to use it. So basically, normalize it”. Another student noted, “I have used it even though I don’t need to financially and it has helped me get through exams when I don’t have time to go to the store. Overall, I would improve this service by making it more aware that anyone can use it therefore it gets rid of any stigma someone has”. Another student recommended that we “have different ‘pop-up’ centres [for the food bank] around campus to alleviate any shame a student may feel when walking into the building”. Similarly, one student suggested “if the program gives out coupons/tabs or something in paper form, perhaps offer it through email so students don’t have to come in person to retrieve. It can be a barrier either for accessibility reasons or stigma to come in person”.

Last, many students emphasized the importance of discretion and anonymity when accessing food related support programming. The Brantford food bank “is centralized in a busy space (lobby of SU building) and bags are largely marked with ‘FOOD BANK’” and that it needs to be “more discrete”. One student complained that “requesting a food bank CAN’T be done anonymously when you need to use your Laurier email to apply for it”.

#### 4.5.4 GETTING INVOLVED

Several students identified themselves as privileged and instead of needing to access food related services they were interested in getting involved to support the issue of student food insecurity. One student said, “Tell us how we can donate or volunteer with the food bank”. Several others expressed interest in supporting a food drive to support their community.

**“... the times I ate best were sneaking into events with fruit and veggie trays and pretending I was supposed to be there.”**

- WLU Student, anonymous

## 5.0 STRATEGIC PRIORITY AREAS TO ADDRESS STUDENT FOOD INSECURITY

Student food insecurity at Canadian universities was an acute issue prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the results of this research, it is evident that the pandemic environment has exacerbated the issue of student food insecurity at WLU. The rate of severe food insecurity among the student population is significantly higher in comparison to research conducted at other Canadian universities prior to the pandemic. The results from this study indicate that there is an urgent need to address a growing problem of acute student food insecurity at WLU. The following section outlines a series of strategic priority areas that the WLU community can collectively address to help improve students’ experiences with food insecurity.





## 5.1 EDUCATE AND RAISE AWARENESS

Student food insecurity can be an invisible problem to those who do not experience it. For those who quietly struggle to access a healthy and nutritious diet, it affects their physical, social, and mental health as well as their student experience and performance. A key finding from this study is that the issue of student food insecurity is not well known and that students are either unaware of the support services available to them or they hesitate to access them because of perceived stigma or shame.

Current and future efforts to address student food insecurity need to start with educating the community about the severity of the issue and raise awareness around the current support services available to students. We need to ensure that information about options for students who struggle with food insecurity is available, relevant, and accessible to our student population. With stigma being such a barrier for students to access food support services, we need to have a university wide conversation that educates, advocates, and addresses this growing need.

## 5.2 INCREASE ACCESS TO HEALTHY AND NUTRITIOUS MEALS

A number of pre-existing programs such as the Food Bank and Fresh Fruit Fridays make meaningful contributions to increasing student access to healthy and nutritious meals. As a community, we need to encourage the development of evidence-based programming to ensure that the support services available address the diversity of needs our student body faces. This includes reviewing the model and operation of the Food Bank and working closely with them to address issues of accessibility and nutrition that this study has highlighted. In addition, we need to advocate for innovation in how we design our campus environments to ensure that fresh and nutritious foods are available to students in the spaces that they frequent.

## 5.3 ADDRESS FOOD INJUSTICE

Student food insecurity exacerbates systemic inequalities in our community. Addressing food injustice entails collectively normalizing a holistic and structural view of our food environment that sees healthy food as a students' right and then addressing structural barriers to that right. This study identifies a number of demographics in our student community that disproportionately experiences severe food insecurity, including women and non-binary folk, students who identify as a visible minority, students living with a disability, and students with dependents. In addition, food injustice is geographical. Experiences of food insecurity differ between our campus locations, with Brantford students experiencing the highest rates of food insecurity.

To address food injustice in our community, we need to continue supporting awareness campaigns that educate us about the root causes of food insecurity as a social justice issue. Programming also needs to facilitate an environment of belonging for at-risk students as to address the issue of stigma and shame.

## 5.4 IMPROVE FOOD LITERACY

The results of this study indicate a need to provide programming to help students make good decisions to support their health. While improving food literacy does not address the systemic dimensions of student food insecurity, it can help mitigate the issue by improving nutritional knowledge, budgeting, food skills, and building confidence in food choices. Several programs that improve food literacy are already available to WLU students, such as occasional cooking classes and budgeting support. With those in mind, we need to provide students with more opportunities to learn how to prepare healthy and affordable meals for themselves and their families. This involves bolstering current programming that is committed to building these skills and innovating the ways in which we make these programs accessible to students.

# 6.0 MOVING FORWARD

This study contributes to the emerging area of research on post-secondary student food insecurity at Canadian universities. The purpose of this report is to inform the WLU community of a growing need to revisit the conversation of student food insecurity on our campus and support the development of evidence-based programming for our students. Future work done on the issue should focus on conducting further evaluation into current food support programming at WLU and promote a continued discussion with key stakeholders for the purpose of improving student food security. The Food 4 Hawks project intends to be a first step to revisiting, understanding, and addressing campus food insecurity. We call on the WLU community to come together to address an urgent and growing need among our students.





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