

Eating While at University:

An Exploration of Acadia University Student Experiences

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis was to explore Acadia University student experiences of eating, focusing on challenges to healthy eating. Studying at the college/university level often marks the first time when students are assuming responsibility for feeding themselves. Existing studies focusing on nutrition and university students have largely focused on dietary causes of weight gain, without exploring the eating experiences of students. The extant research reports are thus non-contributory to understanding the actual phenomenon of eating. This qualitative phenomenology involved one-on-one semi-structured interviews with undergraduate students (n = 8) from Acadia University. Participants included students from each year of study, four men and four women, and students living on and off-campus. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed via thematic analysis. Thematic analysis led to the identification of seven major themes related to how, what, and when students eat: 1) food quality and availability for participants living on-campus; 2) convenience and time constraints when cooking for oneself; 3) the value of experience; 4) social situations and the influence of others; 5) pride and guilt; 6) preferring sleep over eating; and 7) budgeting. This information can be used to inform the study of the issue for a larger number of respondents, and to inform the development of healthy lifestyle programs and of a healthy food policy at Acadia University.