

Increasing Access and Awareness to the AMS Food Bank for UBC Students

For
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By
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Dear Mr. Laezza,

As UBC continues to create a more equitable and inclusive community, exploring methods to improve student health and wellness is a core factor to consider in the promotion of overall student wellbeing and academic experience. One key issue prevalent among UBC students is the experience of food insecurity in which students are unable to meet their basic needs for safe and sufficient food.

This report on Increasing Access and Awareness to the AMS Food Bank for UBC Students is intended to investigate and address the increasing prevalence of food insecurity. It provides an understanding of the complexity of food insecurity and the impact of mitigating this concern through increased support for food resource initiatives, such as the AMS Food Bank. By incorporating the report's recommendations of increasing access and awareness, students may feel more empowered to seek support and reduce the stigma associated with accessing food security resources.

Thank you for the opportunity to share the results from this investigation. Please feel free to contact me at hzhou2@student.ubc.ca if you have any additional questions or comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Helen Zhou', with a stylized flourish underneath.

Helen Zhou

Table of Contents

I. Abstract	5
II. Introduction	6
A. Definition of Food Security, Food Insecurity and Food Accessibility Resources	6
B. Background on the AMS Food Bank and Prevalence of Student Food Insecurity at UBC	6
C. Barriers and Challenges for Student Food Bank Access	7
D. Purpose of Report	7
E. Description of Data Sources	8
F. Scope of Inquiry	8
III. Data Section 1: Analysis of Collected Data	9
A. Current Awareness for the AMS Food Bank and the Presence of Food Insecurity at UBC	9
B. Importance for Food Accessibility Resources at UBC	11
C. Significance of Information and Updates regarding Food Accessibility Resources	11
D. Summary of Secondary Research	12
IV. Data Section 2: Barriers for access and awareness of the AMS Food Bank among students	13
A. Current Stigma Surrounding Accessing Food Accessibility Resources	13
B. Limited Funding Opportunities	14
C. Low Food Security Initiative Engagement and Involvement among Students	14
V. Data Section 3: Proposed Solution and Feasibility	14
A. Feasibility of Increasing Funding for the AMS Food Bank	14
B. Potential Benefits of Increased Promotion of the AMS Food Bank	15
VI. Conclusion	15
A. Summary and Overall Interpretation of Findings	16
B. Recommendations for Improving Access and Awareness for the AMS Food Bank	16
VII. Appendix A	17
VIII. References	18

Table of Figures

Figure 1: Student responses on their awareness of the AMS Food Bank10

Figure 2: Student opinions on the stigma associated with accessing food resources.....10

Figure 3: Student opinions on the importance of student food accessibility resources on campus
.....11

Figure 4: Student opinions of the importance of receiving information and updates regarding
UBC food accessibility resources.....12

Abstract

Student food insecurity is a growing issue among the UBC student population. As this concern becomes more prevalent, barriers and challenges continue to exist in accessing resources for support. These barriers, including lack of understanding on resources and stigma associated with seeking support, may leave students feeling isolated during times of need. To address these challenges and reduce the barriers for access, this report analyzes student perceptions regarding food insecurity as well as the background and potential improvements of the AMS Food Bank. Primary data of anonymous student survey responses was collected to examine critical topics, such as current awareness and importance of student food accessibility resources, the prevalence of stigma associated with accessing resources, and methods to stay updated on the resources. In addition, the report assesses the feasibility of increasing funding, promotion, and education for students in order to suggest recommendations for improving access.

Findings from this investigation suggest a strong demand for food accessibility resources on campus, more specifically the AMS Food Bank. Moreover, awareness and education are essential components for challenging the current stigma surrounding access and support. Through evaluation of these results, the following recommendations have been proposed to improve access and awareness to the AMS Food Bank:

- Adjustment of funding and budget to support AMS Food Bank operations.
- Increase of promotion to the AMS Food Bank through social media, digital newsletters, physical posters as well as lecture and student club announcements.
- Introduction of education campaigns to raise awareness on the impact and importance of food accessibility resources.

Introduction

Definition of Food Security, Food Insecurity and Food Accessibility Resources

With food being one of the basic necessities of life, it is essential to ensure that individuals have equitable access to this resource for optimal health and wellness. Having access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets an individual's dietary needs and food preferences is classified as food security (Health Canada, 2020). Contrastingly, food insecurity can be defined as a lack of regular access to safe and sufficient food due to financial constraints or other restrictions (FAO, 2018). It is estimated that 821 million people worldwide experience food insecurity (FAO, 2018), which indicates a major public health concern that can have detrimental impacts on physical, mental, and social health. To combat the prevalence of food insecurity among the population, food access and accessibility resources are provided to ensure individuals are able to obtain safe and nutritious food. Food access can be defined as legal, political, economic, and social arrangements that provide access to adequate resources for individuals (Health Canada, 2020). Student food banks on campus are an example of a vital food accessibility resource as it aims to address the issue of food insecurity by offering accessible and nutritious food for students in need.

Background on the AMS Food Bank and Prevalence of Student Food Insecurity at UBC

In the effort to mitigate the prevalence of student food insecurity on campus, the AMS Food Bank works to provide a food relief service for UBC students by offering perishable and non-perishable food items at their on-campus site (AMS, 2022). Most of their resources are provided through university funding, sponsors, and community donations, which highlight the

importance of financial support when sustaining operations. Additionally, the availability of the AMS Food Bank is an essential service in times where 38.5% of the UBC student population have reported being food insecure, which is a growing concern as food insecurity can negatively impact overall health and academic success (Carry, et al., 2019). Moreover, the rising cost of living and food may further exacerbate the problem and create more limitations in food access and availability.

Barriers and Challenges for Student Food Bank Access

Currently, there remains several barriers and challenges for accessing student food banks, including the AMS Food Bank. This includes the stigma or shame associated with using food security resources, which prevents students from seeking support. Another challenge includes an overall lack of understanding of the importance of the AMS Food Bank on campus due to limited promotion and education opportunities. Combining both the current stigma as well as lack of understanding, it creates the challenge of low student involvement with the food bank initiative, which are critical in the support of operations and continued advocacy for food accessibility resources.

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to determine the feasibility of increasing access and awareness to the AMS Food Bank for UBC students. In addition, recommendations and potential solutions will be proposed for the UBC Finance team regarding improving AMS Food Bank resources to increase effectiveness in addressing student food insecurity. Exploring this area of

focus is important as it places emphasis and priority on the health and wellbeing of UBC students. Furthermore, acknowledging this concern can help reduce the stigma against accessing student resources by promoting respectful discussion and an inclusive and supportive community.

Description of Data Sources

The primary data source for this report includes responses from an anonymous survey conducted with UBC students regarding their current awareness on the AMS Food Bank as well as perceptions of food insecurity prevalence at UBC.

Secondary data sources were derived from peer-reviewed research regarding the concerns surrounding student food insecurity as well as potential benefits and recommendations for increasing access and awareness to student food banks on campus. Additionally, results from UBC AMS Student Experience surveys were analyzed to determine the significance of food accessibility resources on campus.

Scope of Inquiry

The report will explore the following questions:

1. What proportion of UBC students are already aware of the AMS Food Bank and know how to access it?
2. How many UBC students have faced or currently face food insecurity? What percentage of these students have a difficult time reaching out due to current stigma?

3. How large is the current demand for the AMS Food Bank?
4. What are the potential benefits and drawbacks for increasing funding for the food bank?
5. How do students gain awareness on the resources available to them at UBC?
6. What are the most effective ways to reach UBC students and let them know about this resource?

Data Section 1: Analysis of Collected Data

Current Awareness for the AMS Food Bank and the Presence of Food Insecurity at UBC

A total of 25 responses were received from the anonymous student survey. Out of the 25 responses, 24% of students indicated that they were aware of the AMS Food Bank and have utilized this resource in the past. 44% of students reported being aware of the food bank, but have never had to access this resource, while 32% reported being unaware of the presence of a food bank on campus (Figure 1). Furthermore, 56% of students stated ‘strongly agree’ to the statement that student food insecurity is a prevalent issue at UBC. 40% of students stated, ‘somewhat agree,’ 4% were neutral and no students disagreed with the statement. These results indicate that there continues to remain an overall need for the sustainability of the AMS food bank to address lack of equitable access to food. Moreover, although the majority of respondents have stated that food insecurity remains a significant concern among the UBC population, there are still many students who are unaware of certain food accessibility resources. In addition, when asked whether they agree with the statement that there is a stigma associated with accessing food resources, such as the food bank, 48% of students indicated that they strongly agree, 44% of students somewhat agree, 8% of students were neutral while none disagreed (Figure 2). These

findings indicate that students are aware of the stigma that is present when seeking assistance and support, which highlights the need for increased effort to alleviate this barrier.

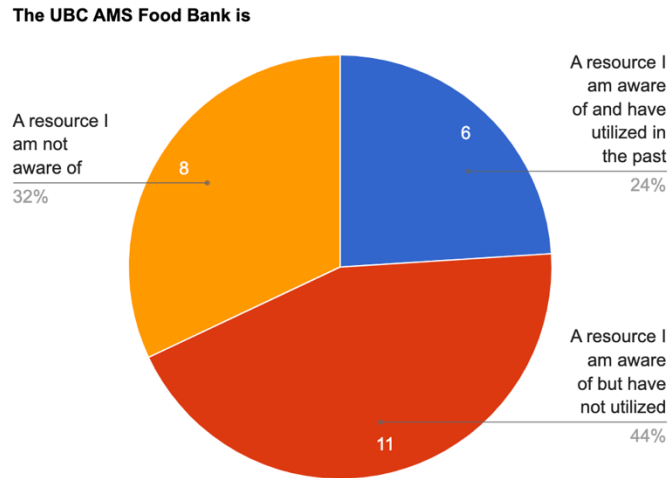


Figure 1: Student responses on their awareness of the AMS Food Bank

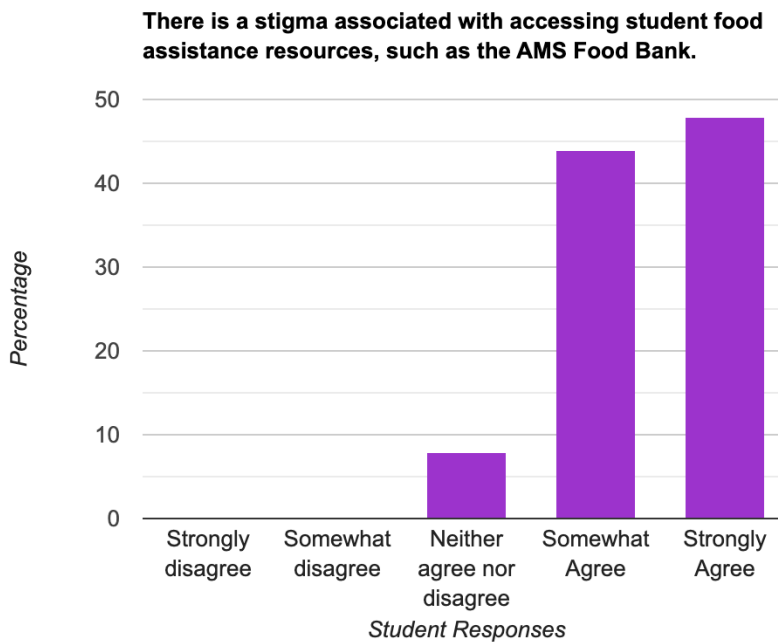


Figure 2: Student opinions on the stigma associated with accessing food resources.

Importance for Food Accessibility Resources at UBC

44% of students stated that it was extremely important for UBC to provide food accessibility resources and 4% of students somewhat agreed with the statement. 8% felt neutral while 4% somewhat disagreed (Figure 3). Overall, these results suggest that the availability of food accessibility resources is an essential component on campus and provide vital support to those in need.

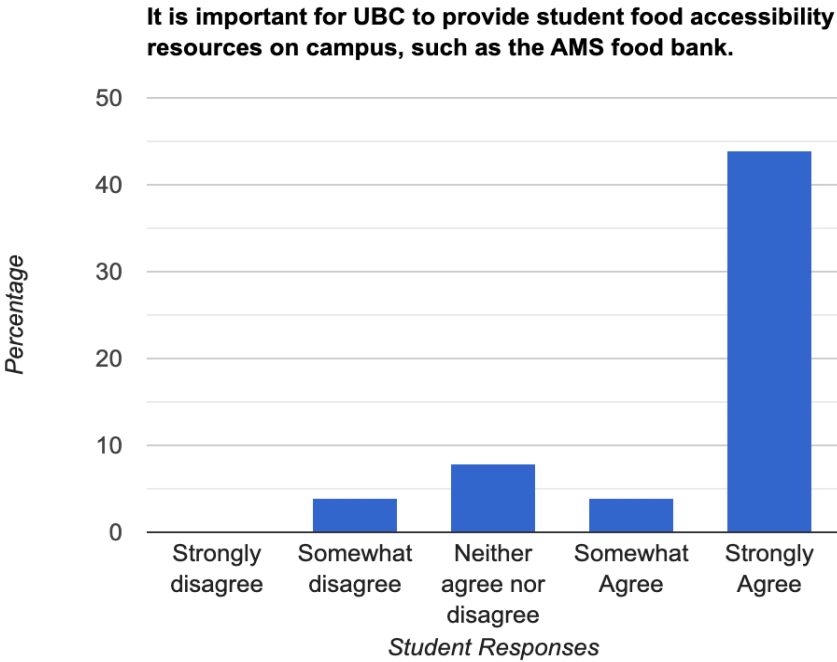


Figure 3: Student opinions on the importance of student food accessibility resources on campus

Significance of Information and Updates regarding Food Accessibility Resources

When asked whether students agreed that it was helpful to receive information and updates about UBC food accessibility resources, 36% of students indicated that they strongly agree, 36% of students indicated that they somewhat agree, and 28% were neutral (Figure 4).

Furthermore, students were asked to rank their preference in receiving updates regarding student resources, which resulted in social media being the top choice for many while digital newsletters, physical posters, and the UBC website followed closely behind. Other methods including, in-class announcements, Piazza discussion board posts, and student club announcements were also proposed by students. These results suggest that students value the ability to remain connected to the student network and in receiving news regarding student resources. They also provide valuable insight on useful methods of communication and promotion.

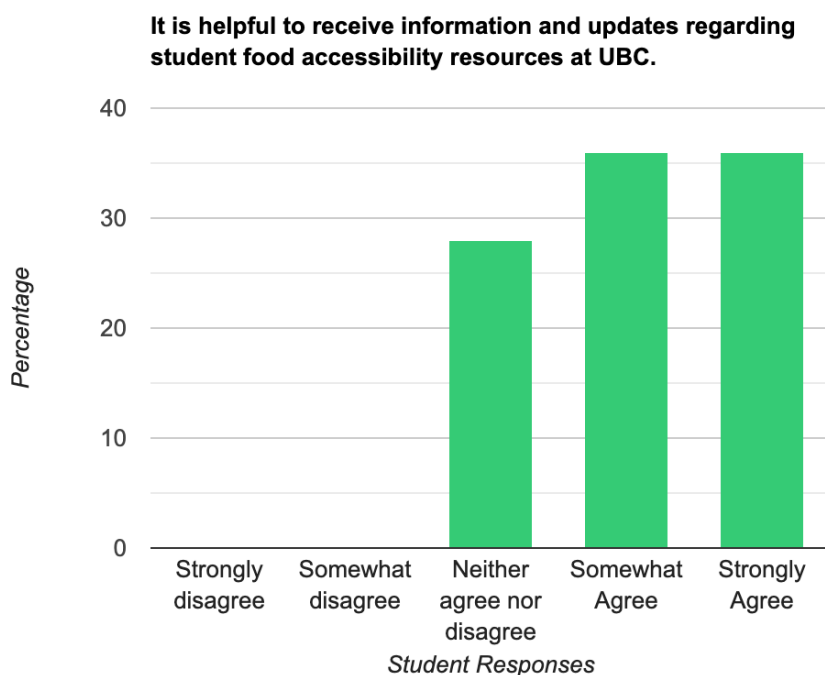


Figure 4: Student opinions of the importance of receiving information and updates regarding UBC food accessibility resources.

Summary of Secondary Research

According to results from the 2019 AMS Student Experience survey (AMS, 2019), which received 2926 responses from UBC students, approximately 45% of undergraduate students

reported concern regarding their ability to feed themselves, including 16% who reported experiencing this challenge monthly. For the graduate student population, 40% of graduate students report having been concerned about their ability to feed themselves, while 17% of graduates report experiencing this challenge on a monthly basis. This indicates a growing problem surrounding food affordability and access within UBC.

Moreover, research studies state that the most significant barriers for student food bank access include, social stigma, lack of knowledge on food bank policies, and inconvenient hours (El Zein, et al., 2018). To reduce barriers affecting access, many studies outline the benefit of raising awareness on campus-based programs and educating students on their eligibility and the policy associated with student food banks (Hagedorn-Hatfield, et al., 2022).

Data Section 2: Barriers for access and awareness of the AMS Food Bank among students

Current Stigma Surrounding Accessing Food Accessibility Resources

Despite the availability of the AMS Food Bank for students on campus, many students still face the stigma of accessing this resource due to societal perceptions, such as the attitude and stereotypes towards individuals experiencing financial hardship. Additionally, many students may feel isolated and alone in the struggle of food insecurity due to lack of awareness and community, which further contributes to the reluctance to seek assistance.

Limited Funding Opportunities

According to recent UBC and AMS financial reports, the AMS Food Bank currently receives \$89,350.00 in funding from AMS (AMS, 2022) and \$25,000 in funding from the UBC President's Office (UBC, 2022). However, in recent months, funding from the UBC President's Office was reduced from \$90,000 to \$25,000 (Asuncion, 2022). Any funding provided to the food bank allows staff to maintain essential operations, such as food sourcing, staff salaries, administrative expenses, etc. Therefore, decreased funding opportunities potentially have a significant impact on the quality of services and support provided for students. As need continues to increase among food insecure students, more funding is required to sustain operations and meet demand.

Low Food Security Initiative Engagement and Involvement among Students

The AMS Food Bank primarily relies on student support and involvement to maintain operations, such as supervising the overall food bank, restocking supplies, etc. However, with a lack of awareness as well as current stigma associated with accessing food accessibility resources, many students may feel hesitant to be involved in food security initiatives. This lack of engagement can make it challenging to create an inclusive and supportive student community.

Data Section 3: Proposed Solution and Feasibility

Feasibility of Increasing Funding for the AMS Food Bank

The possibility of increased funding for the AMS Food Bank creates greater opportunities for access and awareness. With an increased budget, the AMS food bank can enhance overall

student education on the importance of food accessibility resources and empower students to utilize these resources or advocate for the needs of their peers. Additionally, there would be sufficient means to look into improving operations, such as increased hours, or sourcing culturally safe foods to improve the experience for students in need. However, it is also important to consider several factors, such as the ability to reallocate funding to increase support as well as assessing the current demand for the AMS Food Bank. One opportunity to address increased funding is to consider external grants or donations from philanthropic organizations or partner with community food banks for additional resources.

Potential Benefits of Increased Promotion of the AMS Food Bank

The potential benefits of increasing promotion of the AMS Food Bank includes challenging the stigma of accessing food accessibility resources as well as increasing engagement and involvement with food accessibility initiatives. By increasing awareness and engagement with the AMS Food Bank and other food accessibility resources, students are more informed about the community of support available and the importance of these resources. This can help students feel more comfortable accessing food accessibility resources in a safe and supportive environment. Furthermore, increasing involvement to the AMS Food Bank can encourage a community of students to support each other during times of need. It also serves as motivation for students to be involved in other food security initiatives and raise awareness on their impact and availability.

Conclusion

Summary and Overall Interpretation of Findings

Overall, student awareness and demand for the AMS Food Bank is quite strong and will continue to remain in demand as cost-of-living increases. Many student respondents were also aware of the stigma present in accessing food resources, but continue to value the opportunity to receive information regarding updates on resources. Additionally, results from secondary research aligned with the statements of student food insecurity becoming a growing concern on campus. These results emphasize the importance of creating equitable, inclusive, community-focused solutions for access in order to challenge current stigma and increase understanding and opportunity for all students.

Recommendations for Improving Access and Awareness for the AMS Food Bank

Drawing from analysis of survey responses as well as the summary of secondary sources, such as literature reviews, the following recommendations are proposed to improve access and awareness to the AMS Food Bank:

- Adjust funding and budget to support AMS Food Bank operations, including promotion, food sourcing, administrative duties, etc. by considering external grants, donations, and community partnerships.
- Increase promotion to the AMS Food Bank through social media, digital newsletters, physical posters as well as lecture and student club announcements.
- Introduce education campaigns to raise awareness on the vital importance of food accessibility resources to challenge current stigma while also promoting a positive and supportive community of students.

Appendix A

Link to student survey: https://ubc.ca/1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0GoX3QbKYt6NvYa

Q1. The UBC AMS Food Bank is:

- A resource that I am aware of, and have utilized in the past
- A resource that I am aware of, but have not utilized
- A resource that I am not aware of

Q2. Student food insecurity is a prevalent issue at UBC.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Q3. It is important for UBC to provide student food accessibility resources on campus, such as the AMS food bank.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Q4. There is a stigma associated with accessing student food assistance resources, such as the AMS Food Bank.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Q5. It is helpful to receive information and updates regarding student food accessibility resources at UBC.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Q6. How do you prefer to receive information and updates regarding UBC student resources?

Rank the following options from most preferred (1) to least preferred (5):

- Social media
- Digital newsletters
- Physical posters on campus
- UBC website
- Other (please specify)

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