

Title: In the battle against students' food insecurity, cooking matters

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Food insecurity is a major public health challenge in Canada, and post-secondary students are undeniably a vulnerable population. Beyond the obvious point that low-income students just can't afford to buy sufficient nutritious food, many students have insufficient facilities to store or preserve lower cost and healthier fresh foods; live in university campuses with limited healthy food options; and often cannot drive to large grocery stores and take advantage of bulk savings. How can modern educators help the students in need?

Having access to post-secondary education in a university that promotes liberal education, such as the University of Lethbridge, provides students with broad exposure to multiple disciplines related (directly to indirectly) to food. This helps students become more "food literate", meaning they gain knowledge and skills to choose and consume food that supports their health, and, as a result, be able to do more with less even in the case of a small food budget. A step further and towards self-emancipation is knowing how to cook, as those, who can creatively prepare food from scratch, can typically eat better food for less money, and should be healthier for it.

With this in mind, through my course Elements of Human Nutrition (BCHM2300) offered by the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry to all undergraduate students at the University of Lethbridge, I seek to empower those students that face food insecurity and reinforce the sense of community among all. This is a case where collective wisdom is more powerful than course material, and where students share their experiences with their peers to help answer questions such as "what and how to cook on a budget?" and "how to access low-cost but healthy food on campus and in the city?". Cooking is unquestionably on the spotlight and cooking recipes for students by students can make the difference. Everyone is asked to contribute two recipes, including cost per meal, that are anonymously incorporated into the Class Cookbook and become available to all in class. Thus, students are equipped with tools that match their lifestyle and help stretch their food dollars.

This Class Cookbook was a perfect match for the Agility's Food for Thought initiative and Recipe project, which aims to promote healthy food accessibility and build an online collection of recipes available to all students and the community. As the Cookbook began to grow considerably in size, my interactions with Agility's Student Support Coordinator Layla Lahiji helped organize the recipes more efficiently, for example by categories that are relevant to student life, such as recipes suitable for an exam week or for dormitory room cooking. Beyond doubt, this partnership with Agility has been a win-win game for both my pedagogical model and the battle against food insecurity and, hopefully it will constitute the basis for an impactful resource for our students.