

Nutrition and Academic Achievement: How Nutrition Protocolsi Affect International Students' Food-Choices and Academic Achievement in Higher Education

A Case Studyii for African International Students at the University of Toronto, St. George Campus (UTSG)

By

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

University of Toronto

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Abstract

The University of Toronto (U of T) is referred to as a “city within a city”. This maxim is meant to imply that the University of Toronto epitomises all the characteristics of the City of Toronto which is commonly portrayed as ‘*the most diverse urban centres of the world*’. But how diverse is the University of Toronto and how effective are the university’s diversity and inclusion policies? This thesis draws from a Culturally Sensitive Nutritional Framework (CSNF) to examine the extent to which African international students are excluded from the food-choices

offered by the University of Toronto food-services providers and how such unintended actions affect African international students' academic success, wellbeing, and overall life experience at the university. Using oral-interviews, in-depth review of the literature, secondary sources, websites, as well as reviewing the University of Toronto's nutrition protocols and the university's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policies, I examined three related questions. (1) What are the current U of T EDI policies and nutritional practices, operating systems, rules and regulations? (2) How sensitive are these strategies, schemes and codes to the nutritional needs of African international students? (3) What are the programming shortcomings in these policies, operating principles, practices, rules and regulations and how can they be addressed? More specifically, the aim of this research was twofold. First, to evaluate the extent to which these protocols enhance the academic performance of African international students at the St. George Campus; and second, to provide suggestions on how these protocols could be further enriched to better serve the interests of African international students. The goal was to analyze effects of these protocols at the University of Toronto St. George campus and evaluate their potential relevance to the wellbeing of African international students. I argued that high-academic achievement and wellbeing are attainable when the University of Toronto provides culturally sensitive nutritional choices to all international students and specifically African international students. The findings indicated diverse perceptions of nutritional needs and consequences for African international students. There was also evidence of implicit gaps among existing nutrition protocols and inclusion policies. Four main recommendations are suggested to bridge existing gaps to ensure all international students are offered justifiable opportunities to enjoy thriving lives during their academic careers at the University of Toronto.

Dedication

“No one knows whether death may not be the greatest of all blessings for a mortal, yet humans fear it as if they knew that it is the greatest of evils.” - Socrates

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my late parents, especially my beloved mother **Margaret Nakayiza** who introduced me to the virtues of diligence, piety and accountability and uncompromisingly encouraged me to strive for excellence.

Acknowledgements

I owe huge debts of gratitude to many friends, family, critics and contemporaries. It is a pleasant duty to record them herewith. Heartfelt appreciations go to Professor Nina Bascia, my exceptional Supervisor, whose leadership, mentorship and counsel aided this project grow from conceptualization to completion. Your investigative nature of probing for clarity of my ideas has enhanced my abilities as a listener and thorough thinker. Indeed the attainment of this thesis is empirical evidence that your guidance has shaped me into a better academic apprentice. Thank you.

For their instrumental academic encouragement on this journey, my esteemed classmates Joanne Lieu, Tanjin Ashraf, Samantha Larocque, and all the magical members of “A Rarity Among Humans” are greatly appreciated for keeping me grounded especially during times when we had severe contestations of ideas. You are incredible scholars.

I wish to thank President Meric Gertler, Professor Angela Hildyard, Associate Professor Joseph Flessa, Dr. Sofia Malik, Dr. Sheldon Grabke, and Associate Professor Nakanyike Musisi for their invaluable guidance and mentorship. Their routine insightful discussions greatly inspire[d] my thought-process on this academic walk, which is not to say they will agree with everything in the thesis. I am deeply indebted.

I am also immensely grateful to my work colleagues at the President’s Office. Working fulltime at perhaps one of the busiest places within the University of Toronto has been both a privilege and a blessing. I owe a special debt to Morgan Russell, Dr. Anthony Gray, Bryn MacPherson, Dr. Nadina Jamison, Anna Wesolinska, Daniela Trapani, Susanne Miskimmin, Susan Mazza, David Curtin, Brenda Ichikawa, Sherine Daryanani, and Sarah Falkner for their patience and selfless support at all times, enabling me to fulfil my academic demands and work commitments.

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List of Abbreviations:

BHM – Black History Month

CIE – Centre for International Experience

CGPA – Cumulative Grade Point Average

CR – Cognitive Restriction

CSNF – Cultural Sensitive Nutritional Framework

DD – Dietary Diversity

ECASA – Erindale College African Students Association

EDE – Equity, Diversity and Excellency

EDI – Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

EE – Emotional Eating

FDW – Food Diversity Week

FFQ – Food Frequency Questionnaire

GPA – Grade Point Average

HS – High School

MCF – MasterCard Foundation

MOU – Memorandum of Understanding

OVPI – Office of the Vice-President International

PSG – Peer Support Groups

SCRIS – Statement of Commitment Regarding International Students

SES – Social Economic Status

SHR – Statement of Human Rights

SPCS – Shady Park Charter School

TFEQ – Three Factor Eating Questionnaire

UAGPP – University Assessment and Grading Practice Policy

UE – Uncontrolled Eating

U of T – University of Toronto

UTM – University of Toronto Mississauga

UTMSU – University of Toronto Mississauga Students Union

UTSG – University of Toronto, St. George Campus

WUSC – World University Service of Canada

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Section One:

Introduction

1.1 Background

The City of Toronto is portrayed as the most multicultural urban centres of the world, whose diverse cultures and communities have helped create the city's identity as a vibrant global metropolitan¹. The common adage within the university community is that the University of Toronto is a "city within a city" implying that it epitomises all the characteristics of the City of Toronto including its cultural diverse nature. A quick glance at the University of Toronto's Center for International Experience (CIE)² indicates a deliberate effort by the university to ensure her international students are offered all the necessary culturally diverse services. These well-intentioned efforts are meant to guarantee that international students are offered every necessary service that will lead to the students' academic success and well-being at the University of Toronto.

1.2 Purpose

Reputation matters. Throughout the last decade the U of T, has been consistently ranked number one in Canada and among the top 10 publically funded universities globally.ⁱⁱⁱ According to the U of T Quick Facts website, (the - Fall Semester, 2016 – 2017)^{iv}, student enrollment, the U of T was home to 17,452 International students from 168 countries globally. That was a remarkable 19.7% of its entire student population. The same source also reveals that "tuition cost for international undergraduate students in first-entry programs for 2016-17 ranged from approximately \$41,920 to \$47,020* depending on the program."

Furthermore, the most recent annual report of the Vice President, International "over the last five years, U of T have been privileged to welcome 67 scholars from the African continent who

¹ <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/moving-to-toronto/>

² <https://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/cie/ilp>

have been supported through the prestigious MasterCard Foundation (MCF) Scholarship”^v. However, in spite of the fact that globally, International students tangibly contribute to their respective university communities (socially, culturally, financially and academically), there is evidence that their nutritional practices often paradoxically affect their academic performance.^{vi}

Given how many reputable Foundations have come up to invest in young African outstanding scholars (i.e; the Pearson and MasterCard Foundations at the U of T), coupled with the university’s commitment to “enhance capacity in support services” (Gertler, 2015) for international students in order to heighten its reputation globally, this research focused on African international students. Concentrating on this demographic was important because African international students face several drastic changes during their first two to five years. Among other challenges, African international students face sudden geographical/climate changes, scarcity of African foodstuffs, and change in nutritional supply, possible vitamin D deficiency caused by insufficient sunshine during the long winter seasons and the possible lack of knowledge regarding nutritional supplements to improve their health.

Moreover, as **Figure 1** illustrates, the three closest African restaurants to the UTSG campus all carry either Ethiopian or Eritrean cuisines and their meals are overly priced for most African international students’ budgets. Indeed it is rather unanticipated that despite U of T’s boundless influence on various important local, national, and global conversations, there is no official food policy food according to the U of T, Office of the Governing Council policy website.^{vii} Instead, food services in particular and health in general are loosely governed, by an assortment of operating principles, practices, rules and regulations. The university nonetheless, has a *Statement of Commitment Regarding International Students* which affirms that “international students also make important and positive contributions to the cultural life of the community and they create lasting relationships of benefit to individuals as well as to the institution and to the country

generally” (Statement of Commitment Regarding International Students, p2). U of T also has numerous other EDI^{viii} policies whose intensions are to build an inclusive community that fosters an enjoyable student, faculty and staff life experience.

This research involved reviewing the U of T nutrition policies, operating principles, practices, rules and regulations as well as her EDI policies. More specifically, the aim of this research was twofold. First, to evaluate the extent to which these protocols enhance the academic performance of African international students on the St. George Campus; and second, to provide suggestions on how these protocols could be further enriched to better serve the interests of African international students. The goal was to analyze these protocols at the University of Toronto and evaluate their potential relevance to the well-being of African international students.

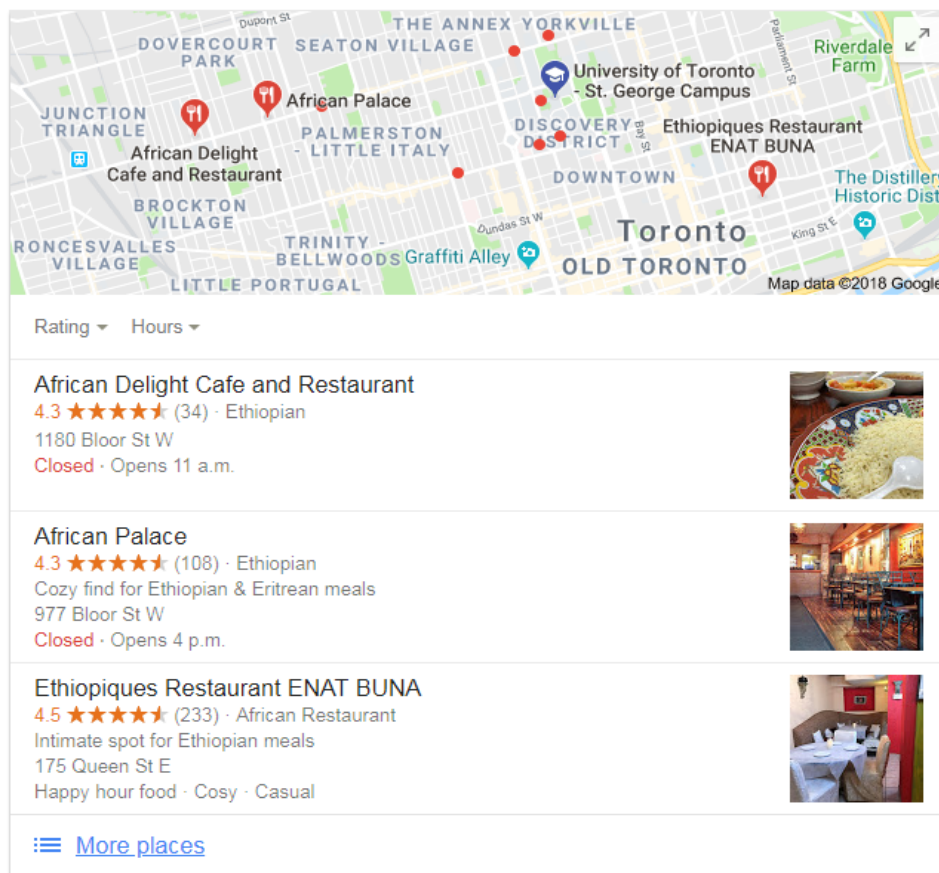


Figure 1:^{ix} *The Three Closest African Restaurants to U of T, St. George Campus*

1.3 Significance of the Study

University of Toronto continues to be the premier destination for international students pursuing higher education in Canada. This assumption is based on the university's "promise to global engagement and her desire to enhance global excellence to attract the best talent worldwide (Sergent, OVPI 2017-18 Annual Report). The significance of this research lies in its potential to generate a constructive evaluation of the current EDI policies and in particular nutrition protocols. It also aims to contribute towards a furthering of a friendly and empowering nutrition policy formulation and practices that would enhance African international students' academic performance. While it is a micro study located only at UTSG and focusing on African international students, the research informs other international and domestic students' nutrition choices and well-being. Moreover, it provides interesting lessons regarding academic performance throughout the entire U of T community including the other two campuses (Mississauga and Scarborough). The study is first of its kind.

1.4 Researcher Perspectives and Assumptions

My identity is multifaceted. One of the ways I classify myself is as an African migrant student who embarked on my postsecondary education career at the University of Toronto in the fall of 2008. My nutritional experience as a fresh foreign university student in 2008 motivated my interest in investigating the notion of diverse food options in higher education.

As an active undergraduate student I attended multiple campus events a week. During this period, I ascertained that while almost all these events offered some sort of refreshments as a bait for student participation, those that offered exotic foods almost always were sold out. For instance, all events organized by the Erindale College African Students Association (ECASA), the Caribbean Connections, the Pakistan Students Association were always well attended because they

offered respective “indigenous” foods. Members of these groups seemed happier and closer knitted to each others’ networks and often ended up enrolling in similar programs. These assumptions were further galvanized by an experimental *Food Diversity Week (FDW)* that was organized during Black History Month (BHM) in February of 2010.

On Thursday, January 14, 2010, I created a Facebook group titled “*UTM Students for Food Diversity*”. The primary goal of the group was to initiate discussions regarding the apparent absence of diverse food options at the sheltered U of T west-end campus. I had been a member of the university community for three full semesters since the fall of 2008. I had also immersed myself into student engagement; first as a volunteer at the Office of International Students Centre and later as a leader of the University of Toronto Mississauga Students’ Union (UTMSU) in my role as Vice-President External. My student activism exposed me to numerous international students from near and far with whom we discussed a “menu” of topics. These conversations culminated into students’ advocacy for the creation of the Food Diversity Week (FDW), focusing on African and Caribbean food options during the Black History Month (BHM) of 2010. See below two diagrams posted on the Facebook group.

The FDW initiative continued to be a fundamental programming of the BHM at the University of Toronto Mississauga. During this week the UTM administration in charge of nutrition conducted food diversity forums in conjunction with the students union to receive feedback from students regarding food options on campus. This experience broadened my understanding of how university practitioners, staff and food service providers interact with students and student activists to formulate food policies on university campuses. While my interpretation of the data and the method of collection may have been influenced by my prejudices

and predetermined ideas, I endeavoured to be transparent where my biases arose in this research and included standards to ensure accuracy and transparency.

UTM STUDENTS FOR FOOD DIVERSITY

Public group

About

Discussion

Members

Events

Photos

Moderate Group

Group Quality

Search this group

Henry Ssali
February 6, 2010

Hello
UTM, following the increase in the meal plan fees by the University, your Students Union is organizing a Food Diversity Week stating Monday 08.02.2010 through to Thursday 11.02.2010 to ensure that you get the services you deserve.

On Monday watch out for Diversity all over campus from OPH to Spigel to Colman Commons and if you don't want what you see come to the Students Center on Tuesday and Wednesday for a FREE Taste of Diversity offered by UTD and prepare yourselves for Food Services Forum on Thursday.

There will be a 2hr Food Services Forum this coming Thursday 11th.02.2010 starting at 1:00PM in the Students Center - Board Room. Please come and express your opinions and ideas to Paul Donoghue and Bill McFadden from the university faculty.

See you all there!!!

WHAT: Food Services Forum
WHEN: Thursday 11.02.2010 at 1PM
WHERE: Students Center - Board Room
FEATURING: Paul Donoghue and Bill McFadden
Working4YOU
UTMSU

Like Comment Share

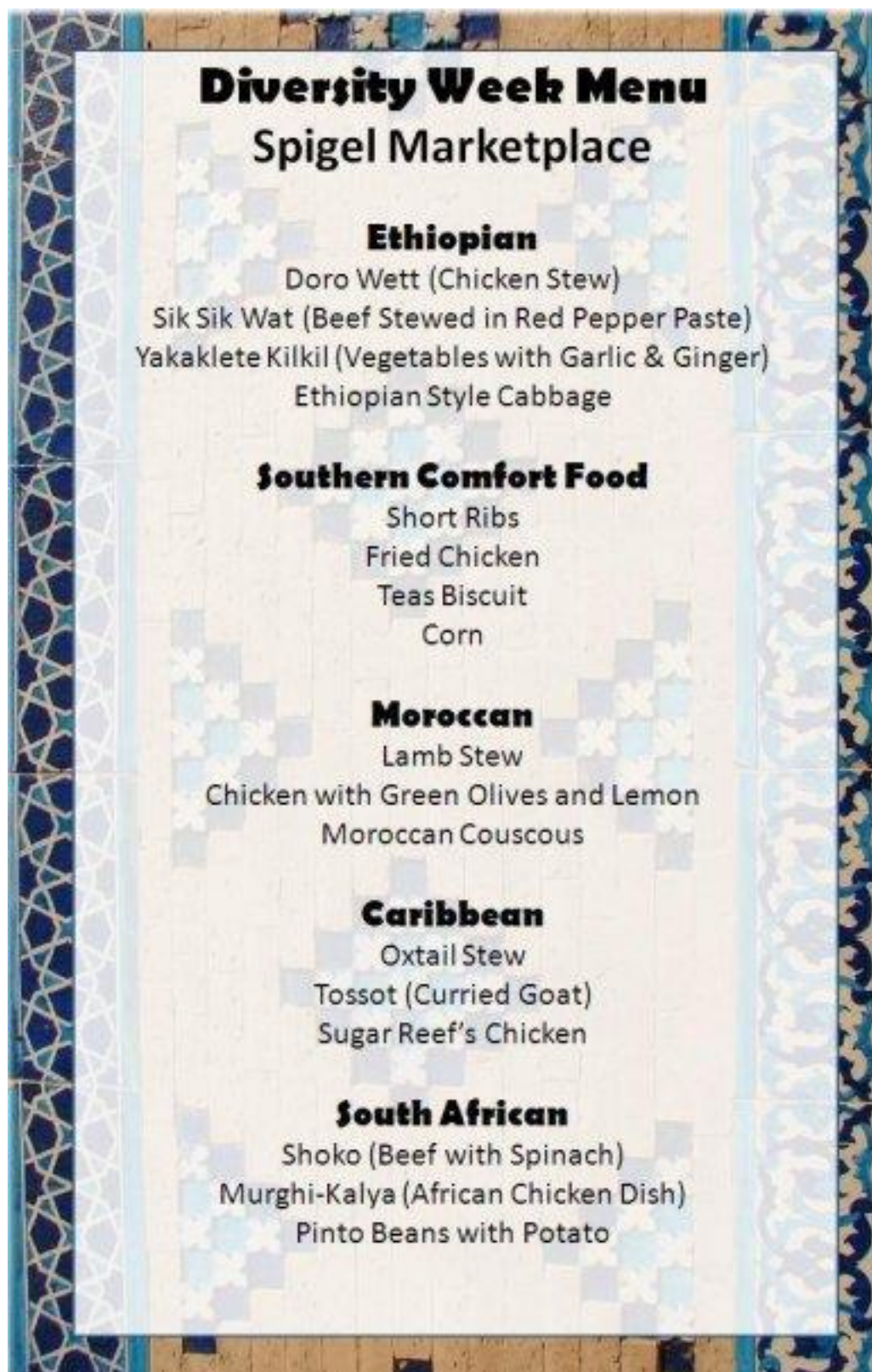
Write a comment...

Naina Singh Chauhan
January 28, 2010

exactly!!! there should be diversity in the food...!!

Figure 2 Above: A facebook message sent out to students in February 2010

Figure 3 Below: The menu served to students during Black History Month (BHM) in Feb. 2010



1.5 Theoretical Framework

My theoretical framework is rooted from Booth and Ainscow (2002)'s *index of inclusion* which aims to “build collaborative relationships and improvements in the learning and teaching environments” (p. 1). More purposefully this framework is anchored in the re/definition of inclusion as it relates to barriers to learning and participation (Booth and Ainscow 2002; The British Psychological Society 2002; UNESCO 2005).

While the orthodox association of inclusion in the education context is in relation to students with impairments or those viewed as “having special educational needs”, this framework seeks to broaden the term inclusion to incorporate the practices of creating equitable, implementable policies contributed to by all stakeholders (students, service-providers, policymakers, and the community). This is important because policies that are thoroughly well-thought tend to be easier to implement as suggested by Richard Elmore (1979).

Moreover, within the educational context, inclusion should go beyond in-class learning and participation and comprise the life-style (including nutrition and eating habits) and mental fitness for all students including those from diverse backgrounds such as African international students in the global north. It should be *inclusion* as defined in the business context. One that encompasses fairness and respect, where everyone feels valued and a sense of belongingness, a feeling of safety and openness as well as where everyone feels empowered and a sense for growth (Miller and Katz 2002; Bourke and Dillon 2018).

1.6

Research Questions

While the overall question that this research sought to answer was: **To what extent do the University of Toronto (U of T) nutrition protocols and inclusion policies enhance the academic success of African international³ students?** The thesis was guided by a number of sub questions. These included:

(1) *What are the current U of T EDI policies and nutrition practices, operating systems, rules and regulations?*

(2) *How sensitive are these strategies, schemes and codes to the nutritional needs of African international students?*

(3) *What are the programming shortcomings in these policies, operating principles, practices, rules and regulations and how can they be addressed?*

This research will help inform policymakers in regards to how these protocols can be enhanced to support and ensure better academic success among African international students at the U of T.

³ I used the terms International Students, Foreign Students and Immigrant Students interchangeably to expand and broaden my research literature review

Section Two:

Literature Review

My literature review covered three major themes related to my research questions. The main themes covered are: 1) Equity Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policies and nutrition protocols at U of T, 2) nutrition, academic achievement and student recruitment in general and 3) ethnic foods, identity and spaces in relation to immigrant or foreign students. In the first section I discuss the efforts the University of Toronto has taken to provide an inclusive environment for her international students in general and I explore how these policies and procedures affect African international students and these students' interactions with academics in the midst of the policy implementation. In the second section I engage with the literature which establishes the connection between nutrition and academic achievement for students generally. I examine the findings in connection with African international students' nutrition choices at the University of Toronto. In the third section I explore the role of ethnic foods, identity and spaces in relation to how African international students at the University of Toronto transition into their new community. I discuss the intersectionality among exotic foods, homesickness, social interactions and belongingness.

2.1 Literature Review on EDI Policies and Nutrition Protocols at U of T

“Diversity is being invited to the party, inclusion is being asked to dance.” (Verna Myers, 2012)

The University of Toronto prides herself in the diversity of her faculty, staff and students' community. According the institution's Statement on Equity, Diversity and Excellence (EDE) approved on December 14, 2006 by the Governing Council of the University of Toronto, the university' *“ strives to be an equitable and inclusive community, rich with diversity, protecting the human rights of all persons, and based upon understanding and mutual respect for the dignity and worth of every person. We seek to ensure to the greatest extent possible that all students and*

employees enjoy the opportunity to participate as they see fit in the full range of activities that the University offers, and to achieve their full potential as members of the University community. Furthermore, the support for equity is grounded in an institution-wide commitment to achieving a working, teaching, and learning environment that is free of discrimination and harassment as defined in the Ontario Human Rights Code. In striving to become an equitable community, we will also work to eliminate, reduce or mitigate the adverse effects of any barriers to full participation in University life that we find, including physical, environmental, attitudinal, communication or technological” (2006, p.2).

The above EDE statement is rooted in the Statement of Human Rights (SHR) approved by the Governing Council of the University of Toronto on June 25, 1992 and amended on July 12, 2012. The SHR states that *“acknowledging its fundamental and distinctive commitment to freedom of thought, inquiry, and expression, the University of Toronto affirms its commitment to the values of equal opportunity, equity and social justice. In this affirmation, the University*

- acknowledges that it conducts its teaching, research and other activities in the context of a richly diverse society;*
- recognizes that the attainment of excellence in pursuit of its mission is furthered by the contribution made by persons reflecting this rich diversity;*
- acts within its purview to prevent or remedy discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, marital status, family status, disability, receipt of public assistance or record of offences; and*

• *acts conscientiously in keeping with its own policies and existing legislation related to human rights, such as its Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters, its Policies and Procedures: Sexual Harassment, its Employment Equity Policy and Ontario's Human Rights Code*" (2012).

While the EDE and SHR are embedded within each other, a similar explicit language is missing within the statement of purpose that pertains to the University Assessment and Grading Practices Policy (UAGPP) which was approved by the Governing Council of the University of Toronto on January 26, 2012. Moreover, nutrition is not incorporated in the University Health Service Policy on November 9, 1993 by the Governing Council of the University of Toronto.

Additionally, while the Statement of Commitment Regarding International Students (SCRIS) which was approved by the Governing Council of the University of Toronto on March 30 2005 proclaims the importance of international students to the university community, it comes short of pledging to provide nutritional options for her diverse community. Indeed in spite of the statement's promise to broaden and strengthen the university's recruiting efforts abroad, the University of Toronto has been inactive in pursuing African international students on the continent (SCRIS, 2005).

It is not surprising the University of Toronto has no official food policy and instead relies heavily on varies nutritional protocols and practices to accommodate for the dietary needs of her students, faculty and staff in general. While the University of Toronto ancillary services website⁴ acknowledges the essentiality of varied food options as indicated by students, there have been little effort to implement this suggestion since summer 2016 when the University of Toronto took over management of food services throughout the university community. Moreover despite having 36

⁴ University of Toronto Ancillary Services Website <http://ancillary.utoronto.ca/food-beverage/introducing-u-of-t-food-services/>

eateries managed by the University of Toronto Food Services as indicated on their website⁵, there's no information pertaining to nutritional food options that relate to African international students.

2.2 Literature Review on Nutrition, Academic Achievement^{xi}, Students Recruitment

“Malnutrition remains one of the major obstacles to human well-being affecting all areas of child’s growth and development, including performance in the classroom.” (Kudzai Chinyoka, 2014, p.78)

A sizeable body of research has indicated an association between nutrition and academic achievement for students in general (Dodsworth 2010; Chinyoka, 2014; Noonan 2015; Correa-Burrow et al. 2017; Faught et al. 2017; Raspberry et al. 2017;). While the vast majority of this research is focused on nutrition among early learners and high school students, there are some scholars whose research has linked eating behavior to academic attainment among university students in different contexts (Papadaki et al. 2007; Riddell et al. 2011; Loomes and Croft 2013; Vilela et al. 2013; Valladares et al. 2016). I intend to discuss this literature in relation to the U of T and a specific component of its student body – the international students.

Employing a cross-sectional analysis, Correa-Barrow, Rodríguez, Blanco, Gahagan, Burrows (2017) used an authenticated food frequency questionnaire to investigate the relationship between nutritional quality snacking and high school academic achievement among 678 students aged 16 to 17 years in Santiago, Chile. It measured how that association affected students’ intention to enroll in higher education. Correa-Burrows and colleagues used High School (HS) grade point average (GPA), the prospect of graduating from HS, and the odds of participating in the college admissions test as variables to measure the correlation between nutritional quality snacking and academic outcomes. The authors used Stata SE for Windows 12.0 to process their data. They performed a multivariate analysis to determine the independent association of nutritious snacking

⁵ University of Toronto Food Services Website <https://ueat.utoronto.ca/weekly-menus-2018/>

with having completed high school and having taken college entrance exams. They also tested for effect measure modification (interaction) by weight status and physical activity, in the association between quality of snacking and academic outcomes using two-way ANOVA. Their findings indicated an association between healthy dietary habits and higher academic attainment and strong desires to pursue postsecondary education. Likewise, poor nutritious habits yielded poor academic performance and lower motivation to enroll in higher education.

While Correa-Barrows and colleagues observed three limitations associated with interpreting their results, the shortcomings surrounding their sample representation offers an opportunity to investigate the connection between economic status and access to nutritious snacks. For example, Vilela, Santos, Padrão, Caraher (2014) research; suggests, that “food choices can be influenced by living arrangements, costs and economic limitations (p.421).” This leads to question whether living in low and middle SES households naturally translate into inaccessible nutritious snacks. How do African international students equipped with the knowledge that quality nutritional habits directly correlate into academic success use that information to their advantage? How does having access to such data inform nutrition protocols at U of T, St. George Campus? Should the question regarding affordability of health snacks be justified? How exactly do health-eating habits lead to increased motivation for higher education among high school students? Is it a question of causation or association?

Essentially, Correa-Burrows, and colleagues and Valladares, Durán, Matheus, DuránAgüero, Obregón, & Ramírez-Tagle (2016) agree that while an association between academic achievement and eating behavior is apparent, further studies are required to explore the causes of that relationship. Consequently, the purpose of Correa-Burrows and colleagues’ study was important and has tangible implications to my research. Furthermore, my research presents a strong case

informing policymakers at U of T the importance of fostering healthy lifestyles as a prerequisite for high academic achievement among African international students. This is a serious revelation to student-life service providers at U of T seeking to enrich foreign African students' livelihoods at the university.

Loomes and Croft (2013) used a quantitative survey method with a self-administered questionnaire as the main tool to investigate the eating behavior of 300 international students studying at four campuses of an Australian university. A cross-sectional survey was designed, and had three sections projected; 1) to capture demographic data particularly age, gender, nationality and duration in Australia, 2) to report on students' eating behavior for the previous day, and 3) closed questions to verify and record students' perceptions regarding practical cooking and nutritional knowledge. Data from this last section also solicited information on whether students felt cooking and or nutritional classes would be beneficial. The objectives of the questionnaire were explained to the students and they were informed that it would take 10 minutes and was voluntary. The research sample consisted of students of 31 different nationalities and at the end of the research 316 questionnaires were returned. The researchers used the SPSS program to analyze their data and offered six recommendations geared at what the university should do.

Loomes and Croft's study was able to establish that poor dietary and eating behavior was prevalent across all four campuses. However, the study seems to be more descriptive than analytical. For instance, a discussion of the intersectionality of the variables was never attempted. In here, a correlation for example between gender, class and nationality could have yielded a more analytical and helpful analysis for effective intervention. This propels my desire to focus my investigation on African international students in anticipation that that this choice will help inform an appropriate intervention for this demographic of our U of T students community.

Furthermore, how the sample for Loomes and Croft's study was selected is not satisfactory as the researchers left it to the Student Services department to explain and distribute the questionnaire to the students. Moreover, while they report the number of questionnaires that were completed, there is no mention of how many were distributed. In some instances, Loomes and Croft remained vague. For example, under the demographics section, they state that the "majority of students" (Pg.487). Again on page 488, they state "most of the students" (Pg.488). In such cases, actual statistics ought to have been given to solidify credibility and strengthen their assertions. To minimize such ambiguity for my research, I will purposefully interview up to 12 African international students.

Additionally, Loomes and Croft appear to deduce that students coming from Muslim countries are naturally either 'practicing Muslims' or are all Muslims who are barred by religion/culture from touching alcohol. Moreover, a centrality of culture seem to be given insufficient consideration. Consequently, in this case, unsubstantiated comments on the power of culture are given. Indeed, at times I am not sure whether its culture or stress that pushes students to consume alcohol or not. While I intend to interview students from diverse cultural African cultural backgrounds, I will not seek to engage with their religious backgrounds.

Notwithstanding, this study offers valuable insights with connections to nutrition academic success among postsecondary international students and is a central pillar to informing my investigation at U of T. It addresses the information gap pertaining to eating habits that I will use to understand how best African foreign students can be encouraged to eat well at U of T. Moreover, Loomes and Croft's research can be used to educate first-generation domestic students living at university residences for the first time.

Using participatory action research, Noonan (2015) observed the influence of Shady Park Charter School (SPCS)'s determination to transform its students' nutritional behavior by implementing a 'junk-food free campus' policy. Collaborating with staff and students in a semi-annual process of joint research design and analysis, Noonan revealed that while students understood the policy, they did not necessarily like it. Notwithstanding the rugged endorsement of the policy by almost the entire students' body, the evidence indicated that some students exhibited improved nutritious behavior. Undeniably, student researchers recounted embryonic appreciation and admiration for the policy as a result of engaging with it. After a through observation of the school environment, the author used an emergent coding scheme to create a participatory action research project that he used from March to June 2012. The author collaborated with four non-white male students, three of whom were 10th graders and one was a 12th grader. Participation in a 10-week Saturday class was voluntary and was facilitated by the author. While communication and work lasted throughout the week, the class met for three hours every Saturday.

The study established mixed success given the power dynamics between students and administrators. In addition, while the author acknowledged the difficult position he endured as both researcher and participant, there is little evidence that such a position significantly affected the findings of the study. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of immensely involving and respecting students' voice as a fundamental pillar to making effective food policies in school settings. In relation to U of T's context, and while this study might not be generalizable, it suggests that it is important and how we must engage African international students to establish a functional nutrition policy at the U of T, St. George Campus. This is a timely and relevant contribution to my research especially given my interest in seeking to engage students' voice in the process of food policymaking and implementation at University of Toronto.

Valladares and colleagues (2016) used a cross-sectional study technique with voluntary participation to evaluate the relationship between eating habits and academic success of 680 students, 409 (60%) women and 271 (40%) men, registered at the Bernardo O'Higgins University in Chile. They used a Three Factor Eating Questionnaire (TFEQ) to evaluate three dimensions of eating habits including Cognitive Restriction (CR), Uncontrolled Eating (UE) and Emotional Eating (EE). Academic performance was measured by self-reported grade point average (GPA) and had a relationship with eating behavior. The results revealed that female students had profoundly advanced grades in the "emotional eating" dimension than men ($p = 0.002$). Moreover, the eating habits analysis indicated that women with higher GPAs (above 5.5) had statistically significantly lower uncontrolled eating scores ($p = 0.03$) and higher cognitive restriction scores ($p = 0.05$) than female students with lower academic performance (below 5.5) suggesting a correlation between eating habits and academic achievement. The authors' results also revealed that there were no significant relationships between eating behavior and academic performance in men. The study infers that a positive relationship between eating behavior and academic performance was observed among female university students in Chile. It proposes further research to investigate the causes of this relationship to enable educational practitioners to decide how to improve the nutritional behavior amongst this demographic.

Although this study does not explicitly elucidate limitations to interpreting its findings, it aligns with Correa-Burrows and colleagues' research conclusions. While these two emanate from different contexts (the latter was conducted in a high school setting), they both concur that there is a relationship between eating behavior and academic achievement. Moreover, they both instigate a discussion regarding what causes this association. This study is very appropriate for my research work as it provokes me to think beyond nutrition, policies, protocols, rules and regulations. For

instance, it challenges me to question how gender relates to academic excellence among African foreign students at U of T. Do female African international students at U of T acclimatize quicker to Canadian food? To what extent does willpower affect nutritional decisions among different gender groups? How can university policymakers effectively regulate self-discipline concerning nutritional behavior? While I already have a set question, it will be interesting to evaluate these curious additional questions.

Vilela and colleagues (2014) used a mixed-methods research technique with a food frequency questionnaire (FFQ) to evaluate the nutritional behaviors of Portuguese university students living in London, England. The study's purpose was twofold: First, to examine the changes in nutritional behaviors before and after migration to London, England among Portuguese students; and second, to examine the differences in nutritional behaviors between English students and their Portuguese migrant counterparts. Overall 101 (55 Portuguese and 46 English) university students voluntarily participated in the study and were randomly recruited from 12 universities from a list of 46 universities, colleges, and schools in London, representing a wide spectrum of study areas. Qualification to participate in the study required Portuguese students to be living in London for at least one month and not more than ten years. Meanwhile, English students were expected to have been born in England, and attending university in London. The researchers used SPSS 18.0 software (SPSS INC. 2010, Chicago, IL) to perform their analyses. They found that, "length of migration was associated with differences in food habits comparing to the habits in the home country, highlighting that a greater degree of acculturation in a Northern country could lead to a less healthy diet" (p432).

The study highlighted three limitations including the potential biases embedded within a self-reported assessment, the possibility of participants' under/overestimation of weekly food

consumption, and the fact that it was based on a small homogenous sample size that might not be comparable to the general immigrant population (especially in relation to Portuguese nutritional behaviors). While the study does not investigate an association between nutrition and academic achievement, it offers this study a rich understanding of nutritional behavior among international university students in general. Moreover, it richly contributes to existing literature regarding nutritional behavior among specific university students and it solidifies my confidence to concentrate on African international students at U of T. Indeed, this study presents valuable opportunities for U of T to create diverse food policy interventions to encourage a health dietary culture among all foreign students.

Another set of literature that influenced my research is that which explores the theme of social-cultural behaviors' impact on eating habits, and how the results affects academic achievement among foreign students (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, and Utsey. 2005; Lassetter and Callister. 2009; Pan, Dixon, Himburg, and Huffman. 1999; Shama, Cade, Riste, and Cruickshank. 1999). Powell, Kerr, Young, & Johns, (2017) explore the determinants of Dietary Diversity (DD) and nutrition. They contend that “diet and nutrition-related behaviors are embedded in cultural and environmental contexts: adoption of new knowledge depends on how easily it can be integrated into existing knowledge systems” (pg1).

Koster (2007) who emphasized that nutritional choice “embeds complex behaviors that are determined by many factors and their interactions” originally observed the need for an interdisciplinary approach to nutrition choice. Social-cultural factors were identified as some of the essential factors that influence nutrition choice (Koster, 2007). Observations collected from African international students regarding their social-cultural behaviors, should be taken into

consideration while formulating and implementing positive, diverse, inclusive and equitable nutrition protocols at the University of Toronto.

2.3 Literature Review on Ethnic Foods, Identity and Spaces

There is a significant literature on the role of ethnic foods, identity and spaces. Diasporic communities grapple with issues of belonging and identity because they (“we”) are ‘hyphenated’ citizens who regularly ascribe to two or more identities (sometimes by choice but often by society). Therefore for members of the African diaspora; issues of memory, history and identity are central in the reconstructions of their African-Canadianess identity.

Appadurai (1988) observes that within Diasporic communities food is connected to memory, nostalgia and having emotional impact to their former homelands. Furthermore and importantly, the study suggests that, food and ethnic food places convey cultural norms such as group ethnic identity. Brah (1996) adds that food contributes to our understanding of race, class, gender, ethnicity and national belonging, which dominate Diaspora imaginary. According to Brah (1996) among immigrant communities in Western societies, food is a metaphor for ethnic identification. In other words, food plays a central role in debates about belonging.

The notion that food plays an important role in diasporic imaginary is vividly captured in Jhumpa Lahiri’s (1999), novel, *Interpreter of Maladies*: Food is Home. The narrative is centered on immigrants’ journey away from “home” towards an imaginary homeland. Once in their imagined homeland, as they try to settle down, these immigrants decide to privilege symbols of identity including food. Food is one of the markers of ethnic identities. Food is therefore one of the items immigrants adopt and adapt in their new homelands.

Lahiri (1999) further demonstrates that through the everyday ritual of food preparation and consumption, immigrants reinforce their ethnic identities. Furthermore, daily rituals such as eating

out in ethnic restaurants, shopping in ethnic food stores and preparing ‘authentic’ ethnic food at home plays a crucial role in linking immigrants with their homeland even as they try to settle in their new homeland. This observation is apt and applies to international students who are away from home and feel homesick from time to time. Lahiri (1999) further illustrates that through such rituals, immigrants connect the past with the present, the imagined and the real. For instance, members of different diasporic groups frequent ethnic restaurants in search for ‘authentic’ home food. Food which in most cases is missing from mainstream restaurants or even food supermarkets. For instance, Lahiri’s novel depicts the struggles of Bengali Americans as diasporic subjects, whose sense of self is reaffirmed through repetitive ritual of cooking and consuming Bengali food. Throughout the narrative, food is an affirming symbol of their identity and it is through food that the experience takes shape.

Charles (1995) claims that “sharing of food indicates a close relationship” within families (p.79). Charles adds that, “The sharing of food is therefore something that happens within family household and is an indication of their existence” (p. 101). This idea cements the notion of incorporating more diverse food options on university campuses, it helps initiate conversations that promote diversity and acceptance of other cultures among students of different backgrounds.

Oum (2005) elucidates this perspective with the observation that within immigrant communities such as South Koreans in the USA, immigrants eat ethnic foods because they are searching for “authenticity and representation” and food provides a “medium of emotional bonding, social relations and community building” (p.109). This claim has implications for university leaders as they continue to strive to implement numerous EDI policies. According to Bolden and Gosling (2006) to meet those goals among students requires reflective leadership at the university level, which challenges “underlying organizational assumptions that are inclusive

and collective” (p.3). Oum (2005) addressed the need for food diversity by way of questioning namely, “why do immigrants eat the food they eat? Oum (2005) found that diaspora communities eat or identify with ethnic food because it connects them to their homelands. This observation applies to almost all diasporic communities including university students at the University of Toronto, who frequent ethnic enclaves in order to eat familiar foods. Hence the adage, ‘we are what we eat’ because we are keen to show solidarity to our ethnic communities or enclaves. As Oum (2005) argues, among members of the South Korean diaspora in the USA and possibly Canada, “food and cuisines are important tools and signifiers in nationalist discourses” (p.109). Moreover food is also “an object of nostalgia, longing and desire or a symbol of national identity and spirit” (Oum, 2005, p. 109).

Wilk (2006) adds that ethnic food spaces “represent the new kind of globalization” (p.225). Moreover, Rich (2006), argues that to “strengthen higher education systems, universities must respond to such global competition by attracting more or better students” (p.39). Rich further implores university leaders to embrace “positive imagination, greater so now than before” (p.47).

Friedman (2005) provides further justification in today’s flat world due to globalization, “the most important attribute you can have is creative imagination: imagination is more important than ever before because it is the one thing that can never be commoditized (pp. 443, 469 as quoted in Rich 2006, p. 47). University leaders who succeed in today’s highly competitive and complex environment for international students can favourably and strategically position their universities as desirable designations, which in turn can help to “regain lost students and ultimately help to secure the university financially” (Van Ameijde et al., 2009). These observations illuminate Brah’s (1996) argument that ‘authentic’ ethnic food plays multiple roles including ‘gastro-diplomacy’ and thus owners of such locations are proud to represent their homelands food culture and national

identities. In that regard, authentic ethnic food, in this study of diverse cultural food offerings on campus, would be a signifier of what the U of T offers its students beyond the classroom and recreational centres. For many students, ‘authentic’ ethnic food on their university campus would signify greatness, openness and inclusion but above all, also, nostalgia and memory of what home offers or used to offer in terms of personal nourishment.

Other scholars contend that cultural food diversity has the potential to promote “positive social ties” between the university and the students body (Chiu et al., 2016). By offering such diverse cultural foods on campuses, university leaders have an opportunity to demonstrate the implementation of EDI policies as an effective tool for “social and mutual influence processes” (Chiu et al., 2016, p.12).

The literature reveals identity is reproduced through activities around ethnic food because ethnic food outlets help them to develop diasporic consciousness. Food locations including restaurants and stores have allowed members of the respective diaspora communities to relive home relationships. The literature further demonstrates that food spaces contribute to the transnational community where Afro-identity and heritage is celebrated and relived. In many cases food transcends class and even ethnic boundaries.

Brah (1996) describes these relationships as creative tension between home and diaspora, where cultural and identity connections are made and nurtured through sharing foods. This is significant because institutions of higher learning like the University of Toronto create new geographies of identity (for example, *African-ness*, *Caribbean-ness*, *Chinese-ness*, *Indian-ness*, *Italian-ness*, *Greek-ness* etc.). That is the case because the culturally shaped, culinary practices offered in such locations are markers of diaspora identity (Flitsch, 2011). They do so through the (re)production of ‘authentic’ ethnic, and national identities. Njeri (2010) adds that food is tied to

ethnic identity issues and food represents or tries to represent as much as possible authentic ethnic traditions.

Food also speaks to links between home and nation. Marta (2010) observes that ethnic food locations or enclaves are more than places of entertainment and nourishment (p.377). According to Marta (2010), food-relationship with home and nation conjure up nostalgia and state of normalcy “in face of the destabilized conditions of life on emigration” (p. 378). This observation indicates too many international students who need a lot of support from universities, both formal and informal channels such as provision of affordable diverse ethnic foods. Such a perspective of diversity, equity and inclusion is reflected in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies: Food is Home* (1999). The narratives shows how the food habits of the main characters -Shukumar and Shoba and their daily rituals of sharing food give pointers to readers about their future, but also their identity and what cooking ethnic foods signifies to members of diasporic communities.

Meanwhile Marta (2010) argues that food habits express, “identity authenticity and collective memory” (p. 388). Marta is emphatic that food rituals such as frequenting ethnic restaurants and ethnic food stores sustain the “creation of a habitual and habitable space of a new home where ‘normal’ life is to unfold. Where collective identity triggers memory of home and facilitates transgression to the past” (p.382). Narayan (1995) however, characterizes such habits as forms of cultural conformity. Narayan points out that ethnic restaurants are an important form of “economic enterprise and contribute to the economic survival of immigrants” (p.76).

Qadeer, Agrawal and Lovell (2010) observe that the rise of ethnic food spaces and enclaves is partly because recent immigrants gravitate towards such communities in search of “cultural values and symbols” (p.317). Likewise, Levkoe (2011) contends that “alternative food initiatives challenge the corporate led industrial food system” and are therefore “transformative in terms of

social justice, ecological sustainability, community health and democratic governance” (p.687). Furthermore, spaces such as the ethnic food enclaves in this study “recognize and encourage differences both within and beyond local spaces” (Burn & Purcell, 2006 as quoted in Levkoe, 2011, p. 697). Baker (2004) complements local food spaces for promoting “cultural landscapes and food citizenship in Toronto’s community gardens and spaces where passions are shared”.

2.4 Limitations of the Literature

While numerous studies have been conducted in regards to nutrition and academic achievement in general, there are too few focusing on postsecondary contexts in the last decade and none that correlates diverse-food options on college campuses as a mechanism for inclusion. Indeed this study is the first of its kind in Canada focusing on nutrition and academic achievement for African international students and intends to contribute the literature of international students’ transition into their new communities while pursuing their respective academic careers.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

In 2013, Susan Loomes and Amy Croft investigated 300 international students studying across four campuses at an Australian university. Their study explored what these students were “eating and drinking, their knowledge of nutrition, the extent to which they prepared their own food or relied on fast food and if their behavior was related to demographic factors” (Loomes and Croft, 2013). Loomes and Croft (2013)’s study suggests a possibility that poor nutrition and missing meals could influence international students’ academic excellence, their health and wellbeing. Consequently, to appreciate the learning potential of nutrition, it is essential to understand how diet is theorized in the African context, in relation to nutrition and wellbeing, but also with respect to academic success. The conceptual framework developed here is a modification of Powell, et al (2017)’s Dietary Diversity Knowledge approach to create a Cultural Sensitive

Nutritional Framework (CSNF) that is informed by students, policymakers and food service providers. Although all three main stakeholders have varying interests which inevitably lead to unintended tensions while endeavoring to create a functional nutritional policy at U of T. University policymakers have tensions pertaining to economic, cultural and political considerations including how the institution's reputation will be affected during the process of engaging in inclusive policy consultations with African international students. Meanwhile, African international students tend to think about best approaches to convince university policymakers of the importance of implementing an inclusive nutrition policy that incorporates diverse African food options and potentially lead to improved African students' academic success and wellbeing. Similarly, food services providers face tensions regarding business (the bottom line) and reputational considerations during the process of implementing the university's nutrition policy. Food services providers also face pressures of evaluation from African students as well as assessment expectations from the university's auxiliary services. My hypothesis is that high-academic achievement and students' wellbeing is possible if the U of T provides a culturally sensitive nutrition to African international students.

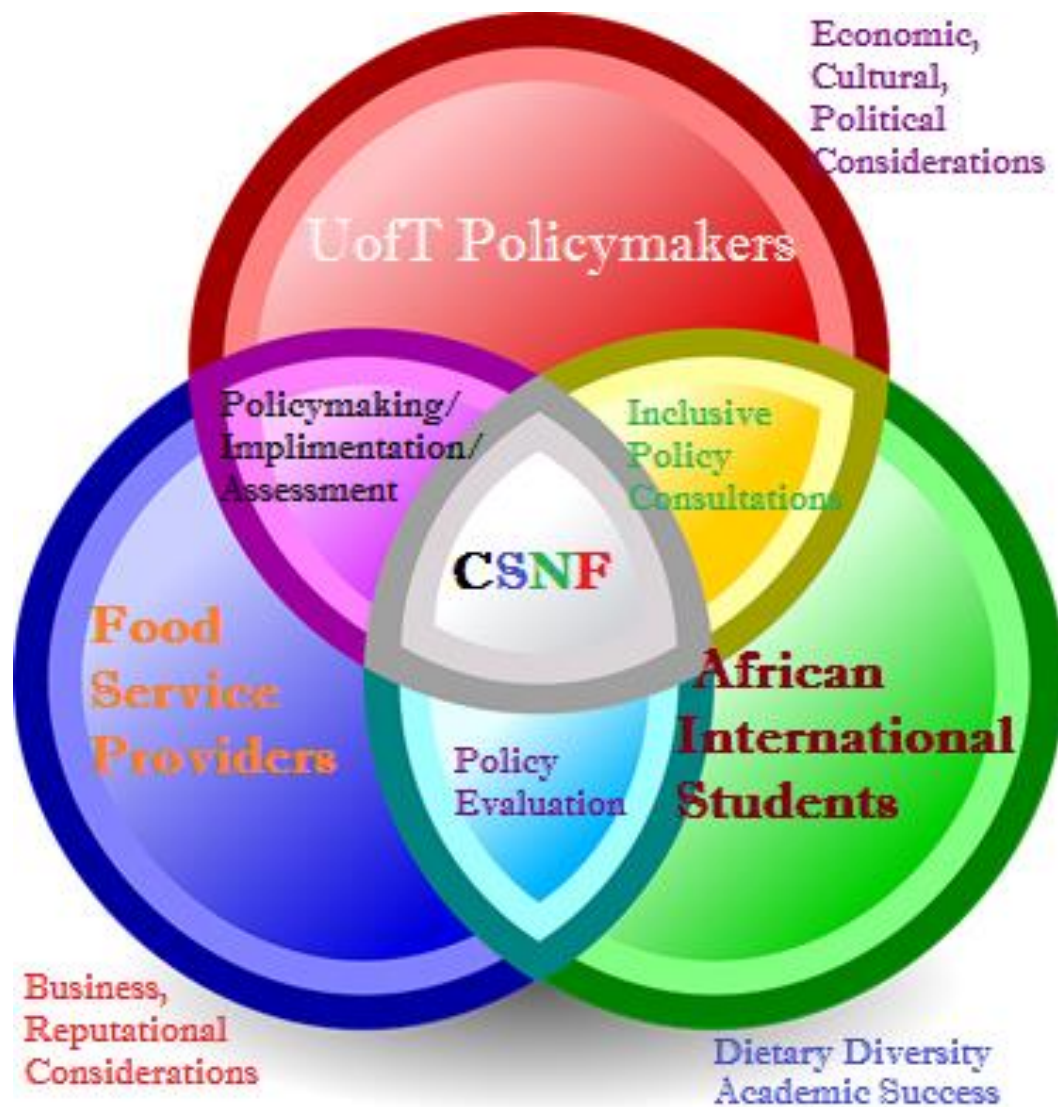


Figure 4 Above: The Cultural Sensitive Nutritional Framework (CSNF)

Section Three:

Methodology

According to John W. Creswell's 4th edition Educational Research Planning guidebook, qualitative studies are appreciated because they present prospects to better understand individuals' unique lived experiences while offering an opportunity for groups who might be less privileged (Creswell, 2011). The aim of the semi-structured interview process was to help draw comprehension to the unique perceptions of African international students at U of T in relation to nutrition and if (according to their individual perceptions of nutrition) their academics were affected. A mixed methods approach was employed during this research. In addition to a document review of existing policies and programmes currently available, I conducted oral and written interviews and a survey with 10 students and 1 administrator. This process corresponds to Creswell's (2012) notion that "researchers purposefully select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon" (p. 206).

Sample Selection

In order to create trust among African international students at the University of Toronto, and as an African alumni/student myself, I attended a Meet and Greet event organized by the African Students Association at the Centre for International Experience (CIE) in the fall of 2018. When I established that obtaining a list of international students from the CIE or the Office of the Vice-President, International would be a significant obstacle due to bureaucracy and time constraints, I emailed the President of the African Students Association, Tabitha Oni, requesting for an *Assurance of Cooperation* to the membership through their email list-serve (see Appendix B). Thereafter, my research proposal (**RIS Protocol Number 36877**) was approved by the Research Ethics Board on December 05, 2018 (see Appendix A).

Instruments:

Three instruments were used while conducting research among students. These were pre-tested on 5 random students to obtain a feedback on the relevance of the questions. The first instrument was a quantitative questionnaire. This coded their age, gender, marriage status, legal status, source and level of income, country of origin, number of years at the University and self-reported GPA etc. The second questionnaire was qualitative in nature and involved a 30 minutes – an hour interview. It consisted of open-ended questions to establish the students’ knowledge of the University’s policies and extent to which they believed these policies were available and if the policies affected their academic performance. It also probed into their nutritional habits while at the same time seeking for their observations on how the university nutrition policies and programs could better be focused on their needs (see Appendices D &E). The third instrument was an additional quantitative questionnaire sent after the oral interviews to the ten students that accepted an invitation to participate in this research. This questionnaire was called the “*Food on Campus Survey*” and sought to probe more information regarding the type of food African international students ate most frequently on campus, which university approved restaurant, dining hall, café or food place the ate on campus, whether they could find their ‘home-country food’ on any of the university approved eating places and if any, which university approved eating place the research participants could find their ‘home-country food’. The last question in the third questionnaire sought to understand the research participants’ total personal income per year (including scholarships, loans, and employment). The questions are listed below:

1. *What type of food do you eat most frequently on campus?*
2. *Do you eat at any of the following places on campus?*
3. *Do any of the locations above serve food that you could find in your home country?*

4. *If yes, which ones serve food that you could find in your home country?*
5. *What is your total personal income per year (including scholarships, loans, and employment)?*

3.1 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews:

A qualitative data collection process took place from December 2018 to April 2019 and included one-on-one discussions with 10 African international students from nine African countries (Botswana, South Africa, Cameroon, Zambia, Sudan, Nigeria, Ghana, Ethiopia, and South Sudan). The participants were informed of the goals of the research study and were cognisant of the logistics of the interview email and the introductory letter, along with any ethical expectations. Each student was given an opportunity to choose where (either a study room at Robarts Library or a café on campus) to participate in a semi-structured dialogue which would enable participant observation, an in-depth interview and sharing of the student's life trajectory at the University of Toronto. Interviews aimed to understand the students' perceptions of their daily nutrition/food choices, how their nutrition/food choices at the university compared to the diets in the student's home country as well as to comprehend the social and cultural variables that reconcile the student's ability to maintain their favoured food choices.

The audio-recordings produced from the interviews were transcribed and checked for accuracy by each interviewee. All interviewees were encouraged to change their responses within one week if they thought those responses were not accurately representative of their lived experiences. The first two interview protocols used during the oral discussion consisted of a 12 and 11 question semi-structured interview guides respectively to allow participants to respond to open-ended questions (See Appendix D & E). The interview questions revolved around the

personal nutritional experiences of African international students, personal stories when navigating food choices on campus and how those interactions affected their individual academic experiences. The interview guide allowed participants to be descriptive in their accounts. When appropriate, deviated from the interview guide to probe further explanations relating to their experiences. For example, I would interject and say, “What exactly do you mean by the last statement, could you explain more?” This was done in order to gather more clarity on the interviewee’s accounts. Interviewees had the right to opt out of the study without any consequences as indicated to them prior to the start of the discussion.

A five question follow-up probing survey was purposefully sent to all the ten African international students that accepted to participate in this research. The rationale for sending the four questions after the one-on-one discussion was based on the assumption that a sit-in interview would have helped establish tangible trust between the researcher and the participant and therefore would encourage the participants to share more personal information such as income for determining their social economic status. This survey also aimed to capture the students’ socioeconomic status while capturing their daily food choices based on which restaurants or food places students spent their dollars on a daily basis.

Document Review:

Secondary resources were collected as well to enrich and broaden the participants’ interviews. These included media reviews, scholarly articles, news reports, various websites and university documentation such as reports and policies on excellence, diversity and inclusion.

Research Site:

UTSG was selected as my research site given it’s location as a downtown campus and its proximity to the various cultural hubs such as China Town, Little Italy, Greek Town within the

City of Toronto. These cultural hubs were important for appropriate comparisons with the demographic that I chose to investigate in my study. All study participants were African international students originating from the African continent during their first year at the University of Toronto. The ten participants included six female and four male students ranging from first to fifth year or masters level. Five or majority of the participants were completing their 2nd year, three were completing their 4th year, while the last two were completing 1st and 5th year respectively. Their respective countries of citizenship included Botswana (1), South Africa (1), Cameroon (2), Zambia (1), Sudan (1), Nigeria (1), Ghana (1), Ethiopia (1) and South Sudan (1). Seven of the 10 participants were none-commuter or resident students, while three were commuter or lived off-campus. Six of the participants were being funded by the MasterCard Foundation Scholarship, two were being sponsored by their parents while the remaining two were sponsored by the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) and the Government of Botswana respectively.

All participants were given pseudonym names to protect their privacy and to encourage them to speak freely and elaborately on their personal experiences. All the pseudonym names were adopted from the Wakanda Marvel Database an online video platform that was created a representation of Africa. The table below represents the name of the participant as it will be referred to throughout the study, their gender, country of citizenship, their year of study, whether they live on or off campus and their source of funding. The subsequent map shows the country and region of Africa from where each student hails. This aspect of difference is important because it explains the diversity of perceptions among participants.

<i>Participant's Name (Pseudonym used)</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Year of Study</i>	<i>Commuter/ Non-Commuter</i>	<i>Source of Funding</i>
T'Challa	Female	Botswana	First	Non-Commuter	Botswana Government
Ororo	Female	South Africa	Second	Non-Commuter	MasterCard Foundation
Mira	Female	Cameroon	Second	Non-Commuter	MasterCard Foundation
Shuri	Female	Cameroon	Second	Non-Commuter	MasterCard Foundation
Wanjiku	Male	Zambia	Fourth	Non-Commuter	MasterCard Foundation
Azari	Female	Sudan	Second	Commuter	Parents
Okoye	Male	Nigeria	Second	Non-Commuter	MasterCard Foundation
M'Baku	Female	Ghana	Fourth	Commuter	MasterCard Foundation
Jakarra	Male	Ethiopia	Fifth/MA	Commuter	Parents
Ndebele	Male	South Sudan	Fourth	Non-Commuter	WUSC

Table 1. Demographic chart – The Pseudonym names were adapted from the Wankada Marvel Database^{vii}



Diagram 1. Demographic Map^{xiii}

3.2 Data Analysis

I extensively examined the interview transcripts so as to get a better grasp and understanding of the content therein. In addition to reading and probing the interview copies comprehensively I made follow-up phone calls to some of the participants to confirm their respective perceptions and experiences to enable me make sensible connections. Using content analysis, I identified themes and analyzed the data in relation to the subjects that emerged from the transcripts. My reviews were shared with my supervisor who provide guidance as to whether or not the themes and placement of data were representative of participant perspectives. Three major themes were identified as described in section four of this paper. The first major theme was in relation to the individual student's perceptions of nutrition

3.3 Dissemination Plan

I intend to distribute the findings of this research using four different channels. First, I will share the final report with the University of Toronto policymakers. Sharing this report will enable policymakers at the university to use my research as a benchmark for initiating a concrete food policy, one approved by the University of Toronto Governing Council and that will guide food services and distribution throughout the University of Toronto community. Second, I plan to publish the findings of my research using my profiles on both Academia and ResearchGate. Third, I will collaborate with various students' organizations at the University of Toronto, St. George campus to organize forums in which I can share the finding of my report. Fourth, I will submit proposals to present my research at different academic conferences in the U.S, Canada, Europe and Africa.

Section Four:

Findings

4.1 Student's Reflections on Establishing African Cuisines on Campus

Participants were thrilled to share their nutritional challenges, academic trajectories, coping mechanism and why African cuisines must be introduced on campus. These students also felt privileged and valued to share their nutritional views. In this portion of the study, participants revealed commonalities of their food-options challenges and why introducing African cuisines will enhance their sense of belonging within the university community. M'Baku revealed that many of her peers wished African cuisines were part of the campus menus and mentioned that searching for off-campus African restaurants was a common habits for many African international students.

“You know based on the other African students I have interacted with, we all agree that the foods we have here do not match any of the foods from back home... you know we go to Ethiopian restaurants and we appreciate it better even though we are not all from Ethiopia.” ~ M'Baku, Ghana

M'Baku acknowledged that she understood Africa was a diverse continent with many different cultures, indigenous foods, customs and beliefs but asserted that African students weren't expecting the university to offer a homogenous African cuisine because there are many commonalities in the foods-options in Africa and all the students wanted to see was an effort by the university to include something from the continent.

Azari confirms M'Baku's views and challenges the university to introduce African cuisine to ensure African international students feel a sense of belonging to the University of Toronto community.

“We have almost every other cuisine represented. We have like South Asian, East Asian, Chinese, we also have a lot of Arab foods on campus. There is shawarma, there's falafel like that. So, it feels like most regions of the globe south are being represented. I don't think introducing African cuisine should be hard - African food is very good, in the

sense that I don't think anybody wouldn't enjoy injera, which is Ethiopian food or even jollof (Nigerian food) regardless of which country it comes from. They are all very good and they are not particularly different or distinct in anyway. They have similar ingredients, they are just probably more flavorful. So, I think having African food on campus would generally make you feel more like you belong here. That there is more around and it's also good and I think most people will enjoy it, even non-African people.” ~ Azari, Sudan

Wanjiku also qualified Azari's sentiments and expanded on her ideas. He offered that while Africa is diverse in many ways, most of the foods treasure among different communities are the same with just diverse names and different preparations. This is perhaps because of the diverse dialects within the different countries in Africa Wanjiku offers that...

“I think just introducing African foods in cafeterias. I think that makes a huge difference if we could have maybe someone serving ugali and maybe beef, maybe ugali and fried chicken and lettuce prepared the African way. Which means hiring African cooks to do that- I think that will be very helpful for African students. And I think African culture as well in general.” ~ Wanjiku

- o (When I questioned if he thought Africa was homogenous he continued...) *I think you brought up an important point, Africa is diverse and we have different cultures, but we do have similarities. So, for example, ugali is present in so many different countries, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, but it has different names. So, introduce something similar to that. It may not cater to every African's need- it's sort of one common type of food. So, adopt something that is very common, going with the majority. I think ugali is a very good example. It is present in different African countries, it's prepared in different ways, it has different names, but it's still the same thing. Having the same nutrients so I think that will be very helpful. ~ ibdi*

While all M'Baku, Azari and Wanjiku made compelling cases for the introduction of African cuisines at UTSG campus, the most interesting response was offered by Shuri from Cameroon who initially described herself as a “foodie” who had participated in filling out other surveys from the New College food-service providers. On this particular topic Shuri spent about three full minutes speaking uninterrupted and still had more to contribute. A portion of Shuri's three minutes' views is presented below:

“So, actually before coming here in my first year, food was one of the things I was like “how am I going to cope with food?” Because you know, when you speak to people

*who have been here before you, they are like “make sure you eat a lot of this before you come because you’re going to miss it. If you can, get this,”- but you know you can’t bring food, so whatever... So, they already let you know that you won’t find those foods here. So, I was already worried about that. And then I came here and realized that I don’t have my foods, I don’t have my jollof rice; I don’t have my – okay, I don’t want to name those things, you might not know them- okay [names multiple other foods from her country]- like all those foods I used to like – okay, I didn’t find them but it’s alright, it’s okay. So, the next thing I usually tend to eat is meat. Because I know that okay, even if they don’t have the foods I really like, at least meat will be something fine, right? But then, I don’t know but the meat here, it kinda has no taste you know! I don’t know how to explain it but- first of all it’s so soft especially chicken. I don’t know how chicken can be that soft but compared to my home-country, it’s really soft. And the beef, the pork, they all taste the same hahaha. Like, you don’t enjoy it - it doesn’t have that taste that I am used to honestly. So, it was like when I ate meat- because I’m such a foodie, I love meat so much. But then when I ate meat here, I don’t have that energy. It’s just like ‘Oh meat, ha!’ it wasn’t like ‘Ohhh meaaattt...!!!’ So, it was a bit annoying to be honest. Because like you know I can’t have those other foods but at least meat is everywhere. But still the meat is like the taste is different, appearance is different, the feel is different, and everything is different. And also, at times I try to eat vegetables which, **I don’t like vegetables on a normal basis**, I try to but still like - like, you reach a point where you are trying to force yourself to like something because you are like I know I have to eat this so let me just try to get used to this. That was kind of like the situation I was in in my first year. Because like, okay, let me just try this, let me just try this and maybe I will get used to it. I guess of all the things I tried, one of the things I really liked – actually, I didn’t get to eat cereals in my home - country but now when I try to eat cereals, am like okay nice, I like it. And it became like part of my habit. But I guess other than cereal, there’s hmmm, – what else? Oh, scrambled eggs - because when you do eggs back home you usually just fry normally but scrambled eggs I didn’t have that before. And that’s something I like. But those are usually just like breakfast stuff - like okay. So, the only time I know I can eat something that I will be okay with is only during breakfast. Because there is always either boiled eggs or scrambled eggs, cereals, and at times pork. So like I usually have an issue - I didn’t have any issue with breakfast but lunch and dinner, nahh ..! and especially the chicken - oh my god!- the chicken has the same taste everywhere. Okay not everywhere but the New College cafeteria and there’s another restaurant called Jerk Chicken. It’s like when I eat the chicken, it’s like the same thing. And at the café for example, when they do the chicken, today they’ll do the chicken, it’ll look a bit orange, and tomorrow it look another color hahaha. But all of them is the same taste. It reaches a point you see chicken and you know exactly how this thing is going to taste. And you’re like ‘oh, chicken. This thing frustrates me so much.’ ~ Shuri, Cameroon*



Figure 5: A Picture of Jollof Rice and other African Cuisine from google

Shuri's views wraps up the portion advocating for the creation of African cuisine on campus and devolves into the portion of the study where I seek to understand the participants' perception of nutrition.

4.1.1 Student's perception of nutrition and defining their needs

In this participants were amenably discussing their discernment of nutrition, defining their nutritional need, expectations as well as sharing their experiences at the University of Toronto in comparison to their home-country. This section also reveals that most African international students encountered difficulties transitioning into university life especially during the first two years of their academic careers at the University of Toronto. For instance on the question of what they understood by the term nutrition, participants expressed varying responses:

Discernment of Nutrition:

"For me, nutrition is the energy you need, energy derived from food." ~ T'Challa, Botswana

"Nutrition I think is having sufficient food and body needs. I think elements found in food. I don't have a technical definition. I think nutrition helps us to be healthy. I think it has a strong link to food, I guess. So, you have bad nutrition and good nutrition - good nutrition may imply having the right foods for your health and bad nutrition may mean inadequate foods, I guess." ~ Wanjiku, Zambia

"I guess it has to be about what you eat, like the diet but not diet in terms of restricted diet but picking from every single thing that your body needs and making sure you have enough of what your body needs in the right proportions." ~ Shuri, Cameroon

"Ok umm, I will explain nutrition to be the kind of foods one takes with various nutrients, or components that particular diets of foods entails." ~ M'Baku, Ghana

"My understanding is that it is about food and what you get out of food. And what is the best way to eat. So, nutrition generally I think of as the relationship between food and us." ~ Jakarra, Ethiopia

"How much nutritional value certain food have. How much nutrients you need. Nutrition is just a balanced diet including vitamins, fibers etc. that you need." ~ Azari, Sudan

"To me, I think a good nutrition means you are having a balanced diet. Having food you are supposed to eat. And drinking lots of water." ~ Okoye, Nigeria

"So what comes to my mind when I hear the term nutrition is the quality of food and also the balance of the food that I eat...right? So, I try as much as I can to eat vegetables, to eat fruits, to eat carbohydrates. But sometimes, it is hard to find all these foods because I am a student. And sometimes I forget to buy certain foods due to financial

constraints. So, some days I even go without meeting the right requirements that I feel that I need.” ~ Ndebele, South Sudan

“Nutrition correlates to the food we eat. It is mainly concerned with sustenance. Sometimes too much food can lead to unhealthy living and on the other hand too little can also lead to some dangers. So there has to be a balance.” ~ Ororo, South Africa

“I think nutrition relates to the various food substances from which one can get energy to do their activities and leads to growth” ~ Mira, Cameroon

Despite conveying diverse perceptions about their individual understanding of the term nutrition, the most common theme throughout these interactions was that nutrition is a source of energy. While Mira and Shuri are both originally from Cameroon, they come from different regions and each mentioned a different staple food yet their interpretation of nutrition was almost identical. Their definition wasn't far from how M'Baku described her understanding of nutrition. Jakarra's conceptualisation of nutrition as “*relationship between food and us*” was a revelation that needs to be more investigated because such an understanding presumes symbiotic association. But how does nutrition benefit from people? It was interesting that Ndebele related nutrition to social economic status by linking his financial constraints to the quality of food he accesses.

Defining Nutritional Needs and Sharing Experiences:

“Based on my experience, I was on campus in my first year, I remember – because when I came here in my first year, the culture shock was so strong for me, so some days, I would go without eating at all. So, what used to happen is that I would go to the cafeteria, find this food and I just lose my appetite. So, I find whatever I can, sometimes I end up coming up with snacks. So, my experience in my first year was actually really horrible- because, I couldn't find something that I could enjoy to eat, that I felt like was nutritious to my body and due to the fact that the food was new, the climate was also new and, it was tough for me in my first year.” ~ Ndebele

I thought the above statement was very loaded so I asked him a probing question to help me understand him further. Do you mean there was a lack of food-options that you are familiar to?

- *Yes! Of course the food which was being cooked in the cafeteria was designed by the university - probably it was balanced diets, maybe it was nutritious, but it was*

probably meant for certain sections of students. For me, I couldn't fit in that group of students because the taste, it was not something I used to eat - I was not used to eating those kinds of foods. And, I feel like I was not well taken care of as an individual. ~ Ndebele

Ndebele's sentiments echoed almost all the students who participated in this study. Every single African international student I spoke to lamented having similar challenges in their first two years of their academic career at the University of Toronto. These students expressed a sense of loneliness that would otherwise be minimised by familiar foods which could trigger memories of their respective home countries and identity (Narayan 1995; Lahiri 1999; Marta, 2010).

T'Challa also expressed similar views even though she tries to read the nutritional value facts of the food-options available in college cafeterias. She laments that chicken is an easier and safe option for her because it is familiar and she's allergic to peanuts.

"For me, a lot of the times, I look at the calories that are written on the nutritional value facts and then also the nutritional value facts on the labelling." ~ T'Challa

- o *"If food is already cooked, I usually go with my instincts. I have an allergy for peanuts, so I usually stay away from peanuts and then try to go for foods that are familiar- like chicken is familiar- and stay away from those that are not familiar with me. So, I haven't tried a lot of foods because it's not familiar with me." ~T'Challa*
- o *"I take a really long time. Because every time I go to the café, I walk around trying to see if I feel like this is for me or not- it takes a really long time. Sometimes, I just walk out without eating anything. I randomly make those decisions and at times there's nothing familiar to me." T'Challa*

Some students explained their nutritional needs by narrating their daily nutritional routines and how the way they interacted with food affected their studying-habits and eventual academic performance. Okoye emphasised that he cannot study efficiently unless he has eaten something and he studies till late in the night.

"For me, my breakfast, I make sure I have at least one egg, like cooked egg. And I drink water, I have fruits. A side from pancakes or a sandwich. I make sure I have egg every morning and have fruits and any other thing and water- and that's it for me. Then for lunch,

one thing I make sure I have all the time is vegetable. I make sure I eat vegetable because there is all this vegetable in my cafeteria. I make sure I have vegetables included with this..., I call it tangerine but like, yeah- and carrots, some of that. And whatever they have, sometimes they usually don't have good food but, I just, I make sure I have this. And I also drink milk, not really often but I drink milk. And that's what I have for lunch. For dinner, I also have vegetables, I don't miss that. And I have fries and burger just to make sure I have something to hold me throughout the night. Because I usually study up till very, very late. So I need to have something in my stomach to be able to study. Because if I don't have anything in my stomach, I wouldn't be able to study efficiently. So, I make sure I have vegetable and then I have so much food so as to keep me throughout my study nights. And that is how my weekday goes.” ~ Okoye

Okoye seems to be more flexible with the food-options available on campus because his academics are dependant on staying nourished for extended periods of time. Jakarra who is a commuter student tends to be more purposeful in what he eats for breakfast since he is able to decide what is best for him.

“I determine nutritious food based on my understanding. So, I just make sure that whatever I eat, it has some vegetables, and it has enough calories for me based on daily intake. So that is how I determine my nutritious food- just based on the calories and based on the contents. And, it can be also the food that I eat at home. For example, when you buy some foods from the grocery stores, you will see like the food has a breakdown of percentage of the contents/food items.” ~ Jakarra

- *“So, when I wake up in the morning, usually, I will have milk as part of my breakfast. Sometimes, whenever I get time, I will make eggs – like scrambled eggs- but if I don't eat scrambled eggs, I will eat boiled eggs, as it's easier to make boiled eggs. And, besides it depends. Like, you won't take the milk on its own, you will take it with a tea or you may take it with cereals depending on what you want. But definitely I will eat something that has enough calories- usually I have light breakfast and by calorie, I mean how much energy is in the food.” ~ ibdi*

Although Jakarra sounds more confident and informed of his daily dietary needs, he confessed to having faced similar challenges embedded in his peers' sentiments and admitted to having learned to manage his life better through similar experiences. Jakarra is also a Masters graduate student who has been at the university for five years and is more familiar with student life in Toronto.

In a follow-up quantitative survey to all the participants in this study, all students agreed that none of the 36 eateries managed by the university managed food-service providers offered a dish familiar to the students' home-countries.

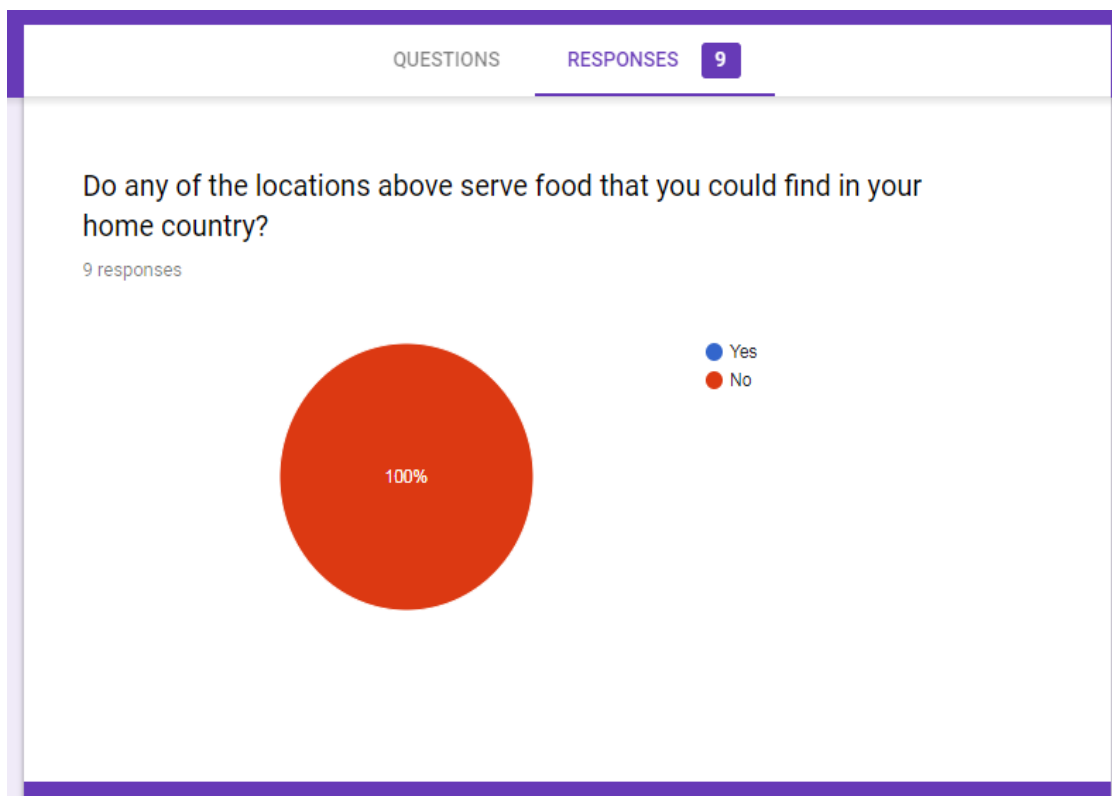


Figure 6: Food similar to Home Country

4.1.2 Student's creating sustainable habits, agency and proactivity

Participants shared several alternative ways through which maintained health eating behaviours using available nutrition options. They also narrated the challenges which motivated them into forming more proactive ways of surviving in-spite of the less-inclusive menus they described in prior portions of this study. M'Baku for example prides in her cooking skills and was quick to indicate that ingredients that make numerous African cuisine, while might be more

expensive than the average ingredients for local foods in Toronto, these ingredients are available in many grocery stores.

“Ok umm a lot of African foods can be prepared with ingredients that are easily available from these local grocery stores. There are just a few that you have to go to particular African stores so the university cannot claim that it’s too exclusive. It’s about getting someone who know how to prepare African cuisine.” ~ M’Baku

Okoye maintained that an African cuisine would be valuable to have in college cafeterias especially for African international students who cannot afford to go home every holiday. Okoye’s assertions seem to suggest that diverse students’ demographics would benefit from accessing African cuisine as it might help educate students at U of T the diversity of cultures in African through the different foods available. He offers that since other demographic nutritional menus have been made available, then African cuisines can also be included.

“Like the foods here, I won’t say they are not as good as African cuisine. Like, Chinese or Indian cuisines, they are not inferior - they are like good food that people eat. But like to make sure everybody is included, every cultural nutritional menu should be included, I think they should like be open to African foods as well. Because African foods are scarce here. Even me, during the holiday, my cafeteria is not open, I cook myself. So, I also look for groceries, African groceries, so that I can cook African food and eat just to feel a little bit at home. But I rarely find them here. So, I just like, get things that I can improvise to cook African food, you like cooking food I feel comfortable eating. Or, whenever I go home, I just bring some of those things here just to cook, you know, during the holiday. So, I think they should be open to African foods here. That will actually help to, you know, promote African students studying better in the university.” ~ Okoye

4.2 Impact on Academic/Mental Health

Participants were also keen to share how their academics and wellbeing were affected by the university facilitated food-options at the UTSG campus and how the students managed to moderate the bad feelings to succeed in their education. Ndebele shared why he thought food is

vital to his academics and reflected on how he lived while he was still a young boy in his home-country.

“Food or the lack of it definitely affect my academics. Where I grew up, food is very vital - through the way I play, when I eat good food, even at home before I came here, the food I used to eat, I was very energetic, I was not sluggish. And this also reflected in my academics. When I was back home, the food I used to eat was good food, nutritious. But here, I remember in my first year, my first month, it affected me even in my academics. So, I ended up sleeping in sometimes, I tend to not even like eating. Like I completely lose appetite and I go a full day without eating. So, it affected how I studied.” ~ Ndelbele

Ndebele seemed excited speaking about the food he used to eat as a young child especially when he attempted to name his favorites like chapatti and ugali; suggesting that they energized him and enabled him work effectively. This feeling was also cited by T’Challa who confirmed that she believed positively contributed to her academic success.

“Yes, I believe nutrition is vital to my academic success. Because each time, if I don’t eat right, I don’t have enough energy to study and to do anything. And I can actually feel it when I haven’t eaten properly” (T’Challa, 2019).

T’Challa further suggested that the university should encourage students to participate in deciding which foods are posted on the websites as a way of improving inclusivity on campus and increasing the general wellbeing of students. This suggestion stems from the belief that African international students are in a better position to advise the university’s food-services providers which African cuisines will be easily embraced by the university community without creating unnecessary food waste which might arise due to the lack of familiarity of a given African cuisine.

In relating her nutritional needs to academics, Mira, a second year student couldn’t confirm or deny if food was a factor in her academics. She stated that... *“Although my grades are stronger than they were in first year, I can’t necessarily correlate it to the food that I was eating because there were so many more other factors that I was facing as a new student in Canada. I can’t*

necessarily associate my academics with food because during first year I was new in Canada and everything was new to me” (Mira, 2019). Mira’s demonstration, appears to scrutinize the importance of nutritional choices as a reasonable connection to individual student’s academic achievement. It interrogates the significance of nutritional choices as a legitimate linkage to academic achievement in postsecondary African international students.

Wanjiku’s reflections however, seem to support some sort of association between nutrition and academic achievement. Wanjiku, a fourth year student suggests that nutrition is important to academics regardless of what time the student engages with food.

“I think nutrition is important to academics. You need good food to focus. So, I think it depends. Sometimes I have a 10am class in which case I won’t have breakfast. So, it’s very difficult to have breakfast when you have morning classes. So, in that case, I skip breakfast, I don’t have anything, and I wait for lunch. And maybe go back to class and maybe study. And after that, I usually have my dinner between 6pm and 7pm and maybe a late meal around 10ish pm or something... Most of it is the usual, like rice and beans, maybe few eggs, at times rice and beef. So if I don’t have morning classes I usually have breakfast and I usually have muffins. So, muffins and milk- that is my favorite.” ~ Wanjiku

Wanjiku’s thoughts suggest that the quality of food may not necessarily be the most important factor regarding nutrition among postsecondary African international students but rather having something that generates energy which would enable students to study. He mentions muffins and milk as his favorite food-choices for breakfast. Wanjiku further elaborates his thoughts why nutrition is an important ingredient to better academics and how the lack of it may affect both students’ grades and well-being.

“I think good grades are always a good thing. In terms of confidence and self esteem. So, if you get good grades, you will be able to enjoy life in general. I think you will be at peace but if you are not getting good grades, there is just that factor of discrimination among your friends that you are failing classes and all that. But I think for me, it doesn’t make so much of a difference I will say. I think there are things that matter more than just good grades and- for example getting some sort of research position I think affects me more than having good grades. So, sometimes good grades are not really a very big factor... maybe like 50% of the time - that’s a huge factor though eh - 50% of my

campus life rely on good grades. But at times you get anxious when you're not getting very good grades. So in a broader sense, I think it's very essential. I mean, when you are getting bad grades and you are not getting research opportunities, I think that affects your mental health as well. It really affects your mental health. So, in a broader sense I think it's very essential to be academically capable, I would say. I mean if you're failing in academics it does affect your mental health and your happiness to a very large extent.

- o I think it does affect. If you are hungry most of the time or if you don't like the food, how then do you study? So, I think it's very difficult. So, if you have bad food, I think to some extent it does affect your study habits. I think it might also affect your sleeping patterns. So eventually that creates a ripple effect in your academic environment as well. So, I think food to some extent does affect your academic performance.” ~ Wanjiku*

Wanjiku's reflections on grades guide us into the next section where participants shared several reflections regarding their perception of grades and how grades affect their identity, access to scholarships or funding and undesirable grades affect or reflect on their future education.

4.2.1 Grades in relation to Identity, Scholarships and Education

Most participants linked their academic achievement to attaining good grades and discussed how grades have a tangible influence in defining who students are within the university community. Participants also connected high grades to maintaining their sources of income since most of them are scholarship students. This second connection was strongly tied to their everyday happiness and their future endeavours in pursuing academia or further education. Okoye seemed unbothered about the notion of focusing too much on academic achievement suggesting that it was all about balancing his life goals holistically. He claimed that *“My academic performance is important but not so super important. Simply because, academics is not my only life. So, my main thing is achieving goals even in academics and in other parts of my life. But I feel it has at least 90% of my happiness because that is basically what I am into right now.”* (Okoye, 2019)

Although Okoye sounds unbothered about getting good grades, he offers that “90%” of his happiness is dependant on getting good grades which is a significant portion of his life because

he assigns a mere 10% to other parts of his life. Okoye's reflection was mirrored by M'Baku referenced her academic struggles during her first year at university and compared her experience in later years when she had gained a better understanding of the university system. M'Baku said that *“academic achievement definitely affects my self-worth and happiness a lot because I remember in first year when I didn't know my way around and was not performing well, I was unhappy... and that did actually affect my well-being. But now that I am more aware of my expectations and my grades are much better I feel a lot happier and self-confident.”* (M'Baku, 2019). M'Baku indicates that having a better understanding of the system is vital to better academic results and often boosts students' self-worth. This idea points to the university's transitional services offered by the Centre for International Experience (C.I.E) and challenges policymakers to continually consult with students to ensure they capture some of the implicit often unspoken norms from international students so as to better help them transition.

The idea of helping African international students smoothly transition into the Canadian culture is vital because the cultures are drastically different and sometimes they can affect interpersonal relations in terms of how African international students relate with Professors. This is so because in most African academic intuitions, teachers are often feared instead of being respected and such relations can affect how African international students access knowledge in North America. For instance where Canadian students can easily approach professors to clarify on concepts during office hours, African international students may not have the courage to do the same which in turn may affect their academic performance. T'Challa from Botswana offered that academic achievement is very important to her because it defines her daily life.

“I think it is very important. Because right now I am a full time student, so day-to-day, I should be able to get out of bed with excitement to learn something new that I'm going to relate to my life. So, I think it's important to find academic achievement. I think I do

actually. Because being at U of T, I have found that professors are really good, and I look forward to learning something new everyday.” ~ T’Challa

Ndebele from South Sudan was also in sync with his peers contending that academic achievement was vital in propelling his confidence and positive identity. Ndebele also alluded to the notion that performing well strengthens students’ perceptions about life and generally helps them mature in terms of reasoning.

“It is very important. I think as a student, I remember, sometimes I have certain targets and in certain terms I may miss some of the targets and I remember also on some of the days I feel very bad- on days that I realize I did not meet those targets. And I feel like the more you perform very well in your classes, the more motivated you become. And it helps you to grow as a student. It increases your confidence and shapes your perceptions towards your professors. Because some students, don’t care - if you’re not doing very well, you don’t even care. You don’t even go for office hours; you don’t even go for tutorials. So, you lose interest in everything. But when you are doing very well, it is motivational.” ~ Ndebele

Generally most participants recognized that grades are essential to their own identity within the university community. They also acknowledged that bad grades affected their chances of accessing future funding and scholarships as well as the students’ future chances for pursuing further education.

4.3 Recommendations from participants.

This study produced several passionate recommendations from participants based on their varying experiences. The recommendations ranged from students’ transition process, to survival/coping mode, to achieving desired academic success and living a thriving campus life. In sections (4.3.1) and (4.3.2) I will be sharing and discussing the recommendations offered to both students and policymakers/service providers.

4.3.1 Student Advice to Students

Participants were able to provide advice to both current and future postsecondary African international students. First, most participants agreed that navigating the university experience is

both challenging and exciting for all students. They recommended that new and future students should expect a learning curve in regards to familiarising themselves with available nutritional-options at the UTSG. The process of assimilating to the new culture may seem perplexing and often costly but there are two practical ways to mitigate those challenges. The first option is becoming proactive and innovative in finding different ways engaging with the food-options available. The second option is finding peer support groups including the African Students Association through which students can meet smaller students groups. These groups are vital in helping new students find peers whom they can connect as they navigate the transitional process of gaining citizenship within the university community.

Being Proactive:

Most participants mentioned that being proactive was the most practical action African international students should consider to employ because it gives them back the power to decide and manage their eating habits on campus which further empowers them to manage the direction of other aspects of their life-style on campus including their academics. In this aspect, being proactive includes among others outsourcing African cuisines off-campus and often cooking for self. While the process of cooking for themselves was defined as exhausting, time-consuming and often expensive, most students who have access to cooking facilities expressed the willingness to pursue the exercise so as to experience their African cuisines on campus.

Participants also encouraged new and future African international students to self-educate about the nutritional values of the food-choices on campus to ensure they choose meals that will give them energy to actively participate in their academics.

“I think putting nutritional information on available dishes - nutritional information, not just calories- on food is important. Because, for me, if I wanted to get food that is particularly high in iron, let’s say, I wouldn’t know which Canadian foods, or which Indian or Chinese foods are high in iron. So, it will be difficult for me to pick one and it’s always

to pick food that you understand. So, putting nutritional information that is deeper than just calories on food would help. And also, just adding different cuisines too.”~ Azari

Although Azari’s recommendations is directed to the policymakers, I contend that it is vital to the students and if taken seriously can help African international students become more aware and purposeful in engaging with they food-options on campus.

Peer Support Groups:

Some participants recommended that new and future African international students should identify peers or groups where they can access food-choices that are favorable to them. This sometimes takes networking with other African students who have been to the university longer and understand the dynamics of effective survival on campus. This idea may include African students who cook and sell to other students or informal vendors that provide better nutritional choices to African international students for much cheaper. For example Jakarra from Ethiopia narrated some of the strategies African students employ to access their desired food-choices for cheaper from the community.

“I had a friend who was working on a start up. His start-up was to provide food to students. He served students for a couple of days a week - So his idea was that students would make orders that they wanted to eat and he would prepare it. I think he had a website, I’m not sure how far it has gone. But his idea was to provide food at cheaper cost to students. Basically what he does is he just delivers the food to individual students. So, people subscribe to that plan – whatever food plan he was offering. And, so that students can buy from that person. I have actually - I had another one of my friends who used to do it too. She buys from this woman who makes food for people who actually ask her to cook specific cuisines. So, he buys like a certain type of food that he cooks at once at a cheaper cost. And nobody was bothered about spending outside. So, she was making lots of food, like great food at cheaper cost so he made a lot of money on his own. So, if there is a stew, which you can eat with rice. So, he would make the stew and he doesn’t have to make the rice. So that way he was making sure that he doesn’t spend that much. So, all I’m just saying is that, you know, there are other options besides dining halls, so how will the university be able to mitigate such avenues? I don’t see other ways. How will the university be able to provide food services besides these dining halls? If it is possible, like, at least have like some people who can actually make these kinds of food. Like African chefs. Like, I don’t know if that is possible. So, even like without having a specific office. One way they

could do this is to, have a take-away service- like buying food in larger quantity but providing at lower cost.” ~ Jakarra

Jakarra’s narration suggests that students are willing to pursue extreme measure to access nutritional choices that they would not otherwise pursue under ideal circumstances and while his message is directed to the university policymakers, it is embedded with implicit advice to students on how to survive on campus beyond regular college dining places.

4.3.2. Student advice to institution

The university should proactively seek to comprehensively implement her diversity and inclusion policies by actively recruiting African international students from the continent instead of relying on third party organizations. For instance T’Challa from Botswana contends that the lack of African nutritional choices stems from having a low rate of African students within the university community.

“Firstly, they are not really available, and also I don’t think we have a high enough community of African students here that it is able to be made available. And also, just, I think there is not a lot of people that can relate with me with my needs, my nutritious needs. I do have a roommate and she’s Canadian and I find that she usually doesn’t understand when I find something not to be in my perception, nutritious. Because she can’t relate to me about it. So the university needs to recruit more African students. They need to invest in marketing the importance of coming to U of T to African students and going there on the ground and presenting to them in high school. - I think the higher the community, the higher the influence the community has on the decisions made by authorities. So, I think if we have a high enough community in U of T, then it will be high enough so that they influence people who make the decisions on food and nutrition. Perhaps not as many as other students, but large enough. Because I know there is a lot of Asian students here. And I think, for me, I find that for every one hundred Asian students, there is one African student. So, I wouldn’t say as much as that, but at least may be three for each hundred? I don’t know but yeah. I find that we are so little that we are the minority- like very, very small in numbers.” ~ T’Challa

T’Challa’s thought-process indicates the university might find it easier to understand the nutritional needs of African students if they invest in recruiting them from the continent because whoever goes for the recruitment tasks may familiarise themselves with the nutritional needs of

African students and perhaps be in a better position to advocate for such cuisines just like Asian cuisines have been heavily incorporated into the university's food choices based on the number of students from Asian countries. T'Challa further suggests that even focusing on Canadian-African students could lead to the university taking steps to include African cuisines among the official university menu. She alludes that other universities are already sending recruitment "foot-soldiers" on the continent and the University of Toronto needs to play catch-up if it must remain relevant to African international students.

"I think, like we already mentioned, including more African international students to be precise. Because, I went to an international A' level school and a lot of universities used to come to our schools to recruit students. And I found that U of T was one of those schools that never came to our school. And one school that came a lot was University of British Columbia (UBC) and there is a lot of African students there in British Columbia than here. There is a lot actually from my school also. So, I found that, I guess the more - because UBC came to my school in one year three times and U of T never came.

- o Like Canadian-African students? I think a lot of ones that I have friendships with are still- I think they also want to feel at home. So, they long for that feeling. So, feel like even if there aren't international students, they'll still have enough influence on the nutrition." ~ T'Challa*

T'Challa makes a strong case for recruitment as a key to improving diversity of the students' population within the university campus. This she argues will encourage the university to include African cuisines in the official university menu and encourage other students to learn about the different African dishes and perhaps cultures.

Another mainly spoken about piece of advice the participants rendered to the University of Toronto was that improvement to accessible and affordable food must be prioritized. Almost all participants offered that the university is in a better position to provide affordable African cuisines by either hiring African chefs or partnering with already established African cuisine vendors on or off-campus. Such an approach participants argued that it could be easily attained if the University of Toronto allows students to use their meal plans beyond that their specific dining halls and

through signing MOU with off-campus food service providers like approved Ethiopians restaurants which cater for the African demographic in Toronto. Wanjiku for example alludes to the idea of other students learning about African culture through food and asserting that introducing accessible and affordable African cuisine is a great idea for both African and other students on campus.

“I think they should bring in an African dish. We do have so many dishes, we have Jamaican chapati- it has a different name, we have dishes from china, we have dishes from so many different cultures. I think they should consider bringing in an African dish, in one of the cafeterias at least. I think that will make a difference. In my case, I do have flex dollars so I could use flex dollars to buy a meal from Victoria College for example. It’s different. So, if you have an unlimited plan, it’s just restricted to that specific cafeteria. But if I do have flex dollars, it makes a difference, so I can use my flex dollars in different eateries on campus. Yes, you have to buy flex dollars. Yes, you can have both at the same time. I know we have very few Africans on campus like you said but introducing a dish wouldn’t only be for African students but for other students as well to have a taste of African food and get introduced to our culture through food.” ~ Wanjiku

Section Five:

Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

5.1 Discussion

This is the first cross-sectional research aiming to investigate the associations between nutrition/food-choices and academic achievement among African international students in postsecondary institutions. The research's aim is threefold: First it will help inform policymakers the linkages among inclusion policies and nutrition protocols at the University of Toronto and how implementation of the identified procedures interacts with both students and service providers' behaviours. This understanding by policymakers will help close existing gaps among available strategies and will potentially contribute to better academic achievement among international students broadly and African international students in particular. Second it will enlighten service-providers of their critical role in creating a vibrant student experience within the university community and to understand how to better serve their student clients by engaging in continued discussions via town-halls, surveys, and other means of communication. For example, it is common knowledge that Starbucks and Tim Hortons offer coupons to willing clients who participate in their online surveys by offering recommendations on how to improve their services. Third it will encourage students to actively participate in the process of creating both inclusive and implementable policies within the university community while developing students' civic acumen and communal responsibility (especially immigrant/international students).

On the question of whether any of the 35 eatery locations officially serviced by the university food service-providers carried "African cuisines" or foods similar to those from the respectively surveyed African international students' home country, all respondents replied in

the negative as indicated in **(Figure 6)**. This indication was in sync with responses outlined in the findings under the students' reflections on establishing African cuisines on campus and students' experiences when they arrived in Canada for the first time. Most students indicated that the feeling of unbelongingness caused by the absence of familiar foods on campus led to loneliness and often affected how they performed in class especially during the first and second years of their academic journey at the University of Toronto.

While a review by Burrows et al (2016) in children and adolescents found higher overall diet quality directly linked to greater academic performance, this study was not strictly evaluating nutritional value of the foods identified as familiar and comfortable. Instead, this study examined the challenges African international students face when interacting with available nutritional options on the St. George campus and how those interactions influence their academic performance and student life.

Do you eat at any of the following places on campus?



9 responses

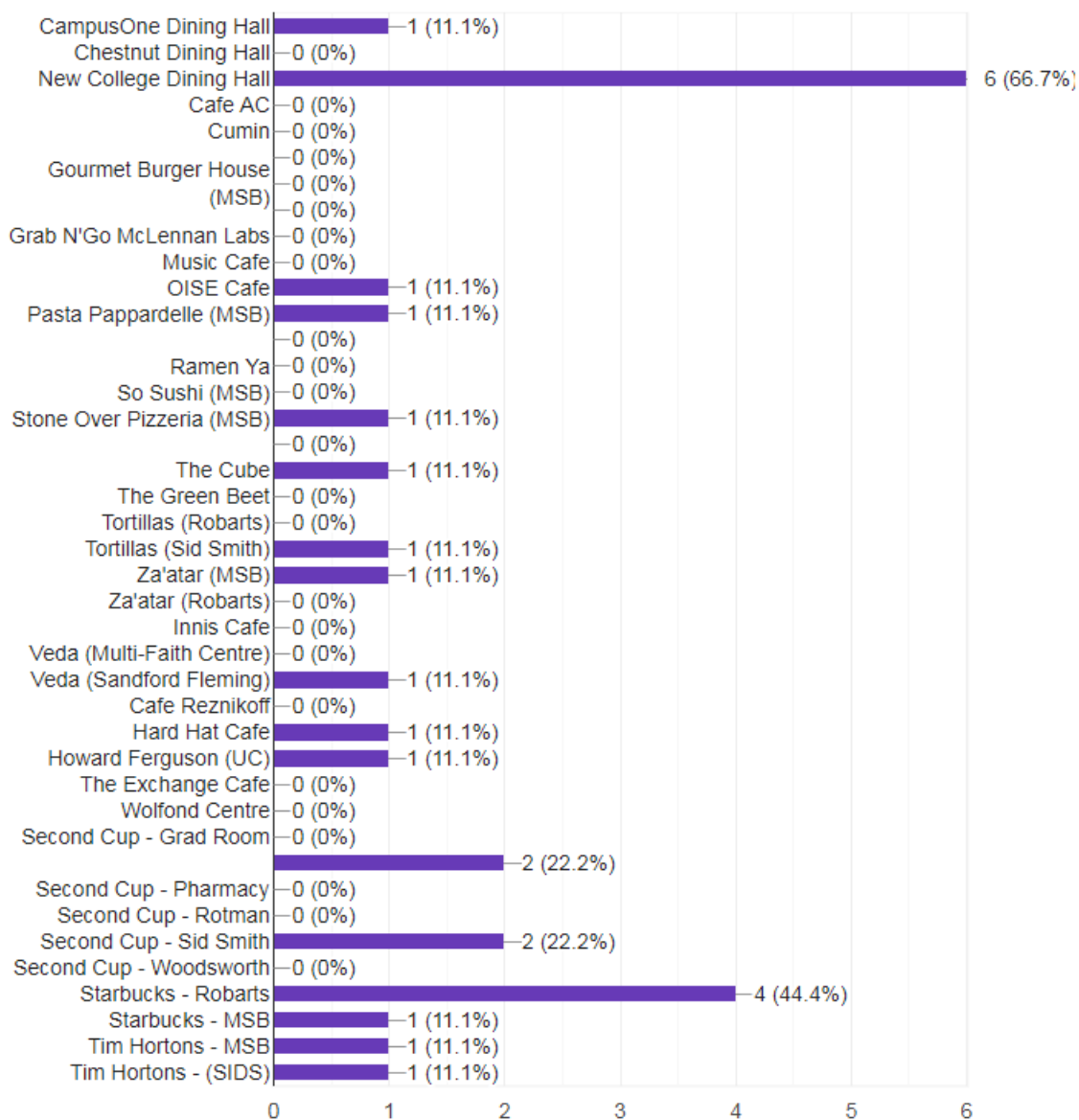


Figure 7: University Official Food Service Providers



What type of food do you eat most frequently on campus?

9 responses

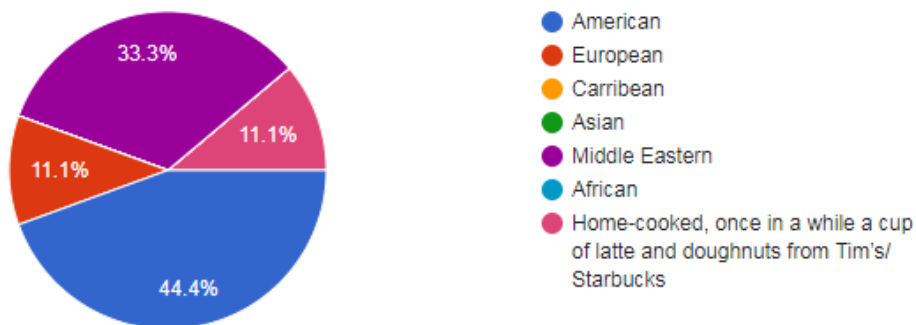
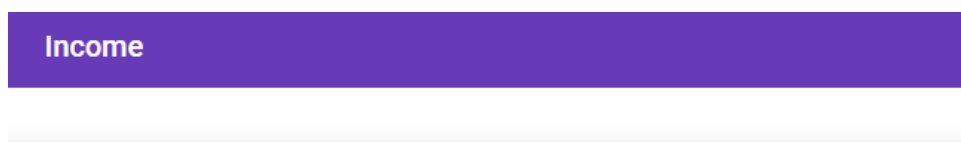


Figure 8: Personal Related Foods



What is your total personal income per year (including scholarships, loans, and employment)?

8 responses

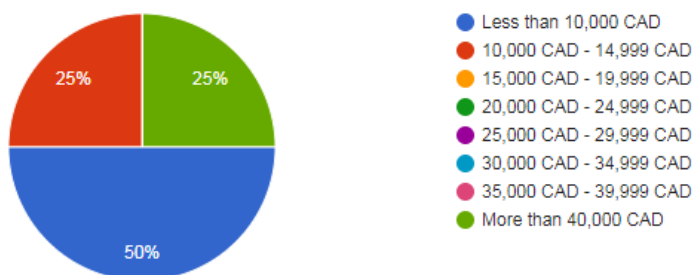


Figure 9: Social Economic Status

5.3 Recommendations for practice

The recommendations for practice rotate around the findings offered by the findings within the study's participants' voices. Although my objective was to connect the relationship between Academic achievements for African international students, the findings indicated tangible evidence for significant food-waste. For example when I asked participants the type of food each one ate most frequently on campus (Figure 8), most respondents (or 44%) indicated eating "American" foods; followed by 33% who indicated eating "Middle Eastern foods. It can be interpreted that most African students feel more comfortable indulging in first foods bought from Starbucks, Second Cup and Tim Horton's as shown in (Figure 7) showing the university official food services providers. We can also incur that this behaviour of relying mostly on American foods is driven by the participants' socioeconomic statuses as indicated in (Figure 9) above. While New College is revered as the most Afrocentric dining Hall, only 66.7 percent (Figure 7) of African international students frequently went there for their nourishment. This statistic suggests the remainder of the food intended for African international students' consumption goes to waste.

Another recommendation for practice is that universities should proactively seek to hire expert Chefs in African cuisine. This recommendation was floated by almost every participant in this study as the most practical solution for making African international students feel included within the university community. Some suggestions revolved around encouraging the university policymakers to sign MOUs with African food vendors/cafes close to the university and expand students' meal-plans or flex-dollars to apply beyond university service food providers.

Also considered as practical solution was a suggestion to introduce an autonomous African international students' orientation driven by senior or upper year African international students for African students especially those who are the first in their families to embark on university careers.

5.4 Recommendations for research

While this study is the first of its kind exploring the connection between nutritional habits and academic achievement for African international students at the postsecondary level, it was guided by previous research exploring the association between nutrition and academic success among high school students in general (Papadaki et al. 2007; Riddell et al. 2011; Loomes and Croft 2013; Vilela et al. 2013; Valladares et al. 2016). Moreover, earlier research had linked academic performance to nutrition among school-age children in general (Dodsworth 2010; Chinyoka, 2014; Noonan 2015; Correa-Burrow et al. 2017; Faught et al. 2017; Rasberry et al. 2017;).

This study recommends that close attention should be paid by universities to the diversity of food-options offered to their increasingly cultural assortment of both domestic and international students. It offers research a new fresh route of exploring the effects of food-diversity on students' academic performance. This research further proposes to the research community that nutritional choices is a credible metric for measuring equity, diversity and inclusion among high education institutions. Most importantly this study could have been more enriched by including more participants' voices and perhaps future researchers could expand it to include international students beyond the limited African context.

5.5 Limitations

No singular metric can be used as a comprehensive measure of diverse nutrition of African international students. A universal diverse cultural nutritional framework for measuring and monitoring the nutritional choices of all international students in general is none-existent and specific guidance on what data to collect and how to collect it has not yet been developed. The need to create diverse cultural nutrition information systems and enable effective procedures and capabilities for gathering of data on students' diets, across all international students

demographics at college level remain a challenge for both policymakers and food-service providers. In an email communication with Ann Macdonald, the Assistant Vice-President, Ancillary Services, she articulates the steps being taken to bridge the existing gap in providing culturally diverse food choices.

“We are always happy to have feedback from students (or others) about menu choices that we might add to our menus. Currently, our 3 residences have student food/residence committees where those discussions regularly take place and form the basis of the annual menu planning process. On the rest of the campus, where we have our retail food court operations, we have had food committees come and go over the years and have not had an active committee for a few years” (Macdonald, 2019).

While Macdonald (2019)’s statement indicates tangible efforts by the university to create culturally diverse menu options on an annual basis, it is embedded with limitations in regards to how these committees are formed and who gets a seat at the committee. Moreover, she acknowledges the lack of membership consistency among established committees and admits inactivity over the past few years. Furthermore, it illustrates a lack of continuity and effective responsible change; something fundamental or required if a comprehensive systemic change must be attained. Although this thesis offers an initial discussion regarding nutrition and academic achievement for African international students, it also offers limited suggestions for overcoming the lack of interest for participation in such nutrition dialogues.

This thesis also briefly incorporates so many different topics that would otherwise be best discussed in other stand-alone research studies. For instance, while the issue of mental health is important to connect in this regard, it is a topic that has been extensively discussed in other studies although not necessarily linked to diet or student behaviour in relation to food-choices. Another

important topic that has been vaguely discussed is recruitment. While the idea of seeking to enroll more African international students implicitly sounds enticing, it completely ignores the challenges associated with finding the best qualified students who can academic thrive within the University of Toronto context. Moreover, it disregards the fact that most African international students recruited tend to have access to either government or other scholarships.

Another limitation is embedded in the quantitative portion of this thesis which was based no responses from just 9 students. While their participation was valued and timely, policymakers may need to conduct a more comprehensive quantitative research, soliciting input from a wider international students' demographic that is more representative of the entire University of Toronto's diverse international students' body.

5.6 Contributions

Given the Ontario government's recent suggested policy model that "ties 60 percent of postsecondary funding to how universities and colleges perform on 10 measures without giving specifics" (Crawley, 2019), the University of Toronto will be better served when her policymakers and food service-providers understand how best to cater for their international students and Africa is a virgin destination that should be taken seriously. My study highlights the necessary steps the university must take to ensure her international students thrive in all aspects of their academic life at the University of Toronto.

This study has also added insights to the broader definition of inclusion beyond the conventional understanding of the concept as it has been recognised by various scholars in in the educational contexts (Miller and Katz 2002; Bourke and Dillon 2018). The inclusion of diverse nutrition/food-options has been added as an element of conceptualizing inclusion in postsecondary institutions. Moreover, this theorising leads international students broadly to feel a sense of

belonging as expressed in Ndebele's notions in this study. When asked what message he would like to send to the Governing Council of the University of Toronto, Ndebele openly articulated that...

"I know the University of Toronto is very committed to diversity but if they are very committed to increasing diversity, they should also be looking to the kind of food that they cook on campus to make ensure it also caters to everybody. And if I could, I would tell the governing council, they should not just look on the economic feasibility in providing services to certain sections of students but also to look at how African students feel. Do they feel included in the community like the rest of the students? And this should be a driving force toward addressing certain issues like food diversity. Because, if we have African food here, then African students will feel included. And the inclusivity is more important than even the economic feasibility of the idea. So, I would say, as much as the university is trying increase and commit to diversity, let them not look at just the physical presence of the students but also what they do and how they live. Do they feel included? Moreover, food is one of the great ways to welcome people, because what you eat determines how you see life." ~ Ndebele, South Sudan

...Ndebele's interpretation of inclusion and diversity goes beyond the realm of economic feasibility to the affective jurisdiction of how policies should operate in an ideal world of pure inclusion as conceptualized in the *index of inclusion*.

5.7 Conclusion

This investigation highlights that reasonable connections exist for nutrition/food habits in relation to academic achievement for African international students especially during the first two year of their academic careers in a new country. Overall results suggest the above association is true for African international students who completed high school in their home country and are leaving the continent for the first time. Therefore university policymakers should consider the critical role of involving service providers and students in the process of creating inclusive policies that cater for all the diverse students demographics represented in the university community. Several limitations have been identified and highlighted that could weaken the evidence outlined by the narrow sample size employed throughout the process. Further studies should consider

exploring the entire international students demographic from the global south and should advance beyond examining a single university campus.

5.8 Correspondences

Appendix A: Use of Human Participants Approval from Research and Ethics Board

Appendix B: Request for an Assurance of Cooperation

Appendix C: Request for participation in Nutrition and Academic Achievement Study

Appendix F: Appreciation Note to Participants

Appendix G: Email Communication Trajectory with the Assistant Vice-President,
Ancillary Services University of Toronto, St. George Campus

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Appendices

Appendix A: Use of Human Participants Approval from Research and Ethics Board



OFFICE OF THE VICE-PRESIDENT,
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

RIS Protocol
Number: 36877

Approval Date: 5-Dec-18

PI Name: Henry Ssali

Division Name:

Dear Henry Ssali:

Re: Your research protocol application entitled, "Nutrition Protocols for Enhanced African International Students' Academic Achievement at the University of Toronto (St. George Campus)."

The Social Sciences, Humanities & Education REB has conducted a Delegated review of your application and has granted approval to the attached protocol for the period 2018-12-05 to 2019-12-04.

Please note that this approval only applies to the use of human participants. Other approvals may be needed.

Please be reminded of the following points:

- An **Amendment** must be submitted to the REB for any proposed changes to the approved protocol. The amended protocol must be reviewed and approved by the REB prior to implementation of the changes.
- An annual **Renewal** must be submitted for ongoing research. You may submit up to 6 renewals for a maximum total span of 7 years. Renewals should be submitted between 15 and 30 days prior to the current expiry date.
- A **Protocol Deviation Report (PDR)** should be submitted when there is any departure from the REB-approved ethics review application form that has occurred without prior approval from the REB (e.g., changes to the study procedures, consent process, data protection measures). The submission of this form does not necessarily indicate wrong-doing; however follow-up procedures may be required.
- An **Adverse Events Report (AER)** must be submitted when adverse or unanticipated events occur to participants in the course of the research process.
- A **Protocol Completion Report (PCR)** is required when research using the protocol has been completed. For ongoing research, a PCR on the protocol will be required after 7 years, (Original and 6 Renewals). A continuation of work beyond 7 years will require the creation of a new protocol.
- If your research is funded by a third party, please contact the assigned Research Funding Officer in Research Services to ensure that your funds are released.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research.

Status: Delegated Review App	Version: 0003	Sub Version: 0000	Protocol #: 11490	Approved On: 5-Dec-18	Expires On: 4-Dec-19	Page 9 of 9
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OFFICE OF RESEARCH ETHICS
McMurrich Building, 12 Queen's Park Crescent West, 2nd Floor, Toronto, ON M5S 1S8 Canada
Tel: +1 416 946-3273 • Fax: +1 416 946-5763 • ethics.review@utoronto.ca • <http://www.research.utoronto.ca/or-researchers-administrators/ethics>

Appendix B: Request for an Assurance of Cooperation



Friday, November 30, 2018

President Tabitha Oni
African Students Association
University of Toronto
40 Willcocks Street
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
M5S 1C6

Dear President Oni:

RE: Request for an Assurance of Cooperation

My name is Henry Ssali a Master of Arts Candidate in the Educational Leadership and Policy Program in the Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education at OISE, University of Toronto. As a prerequisite for my graduation, I am required to complete a research thesis in my field of study and I would like to request for an *Assurance of Cooperation*.

I am carrying out a study on *nutrition protocols, for enhanced African International Students' academic performance at the University of Toronto (St. George Campus)*. To achieve this, I have developed two questionnaires. The first one is a quantitative questionnaire and will take 5-10 minutes to complete, and the information obtained will be of much significance to the study. The second questionnaire which is equally important to the study, is qualitative in nature and will take 60-90 minutes.

To accomplish these tasks I will need access to African international students at the University of Toronto (St. George Campus) and as an association that mobilizes these students I am confident that you can help send out a recruitment letter on my behalf to the African Students Association membership. I therefore take this opportunity to request for an *Assurance of Cooperation* that is a required for approval of my research by the University's Research Ethics Board.

Your collaboration will be highly appreciated.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Henry Ssali".

Henry Ssali
MA Candidate, University of Toronto

Appendix C: Request for participation in Nutrition and Academic Achievement Study



Friday, November 30, 2018

U of T African International Students
c/o
African Students Association
University of Toronto
40 Willcocks Street
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
M5S 1C6

Dear U of T African International Students,

RE: Request for Participation in Nutrition and Academic Attainment Research

My name is Henry Ssali a Master of Arts Candidate in the Educational Leadership and Policy Program in the Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education at OISE, University of Toronto. As a prerequisite for my graduation, I am required to complete a research thesis in my field of study and I would like to request for your participation in this research.

I am carrying out a study on *nutrition protocols, for enhanced African International Students' Academic Performance at the University of Toronto (St. George Campus)*. To achieve this, I have developed two questionnaires. The first one is a quantitative questionnaire and will take 5-10 minutes to complete, and the information obtained will be of much significance to the study. The second questionnaire which is equally important to the study, is qualitative in nature and will take 60-90 minutes.

To accomplish these tasks I need the participation of African international students at the University of Toronto (St. George Campus). University's Research Ethics Board has deemed this study important and have approved my research proposal. If you are interested in participating please email me at henry.ssali@utoronto.ca for more details. Confidentiality will be strictly enforced during this study.

Your cooperation will be highly appreciated.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Henry Ssali", is positioned below the text "Sincerely,".

Henry Ssali
MA Candidate, University of Toronto

Appendix D: Guiding Quantitative Survey

Nutrition Protocols for Enhanced African International Students' Academic Achievement at the University of Toronto (St. George Campus).

Dear Respondent

I am carrying out a study on nutrition protocols, for enhanced African International Students' academic performance at the University of Toronto (St. George Campus). To achieve this, I have developed a questionnaire, which will take about 10 minutes to fill, and the information obtained will be of much significance to the study. Please note that this study is purely academic with no intentions of investigating into your private lives. Any findings obtained, will be treated with utmost confidentiality and anonymity. The University of Toronto has an ethical code that all researchers are obliged to follow when undertaking research. Please respond truthfully to the best of your knowledge. Please note that you can opt out the survey should you feel so.

Thank you in advance for your time.

Please Tick () the option that best suits your opinion and where necessary fill in the space provided.

- 1 Which gender do you self-identify as?
Male **Female** **Prefer not to answer**
- 2 What is your age group?
16-20 **20-25** **25-30** **30-Above**
- 3 What education designation are you scheduled to complete?
Certificate **Diploma** **Degree** **MA/PhD**
- 4 What is your country of citizenship?⁶
Nigeria **Egypt** **Kenya** **Ghana** **Other**
- 5 What is your marital status?
Married/Common Law **Single/Divorced** **Single/Never Married**
Separated **Other**
- 6 Where do you live?

⁶ According to the U of T quick facts page, International students come from 168 countries. The countries listed in question 4 indicate the African countries where majority of African students came from during the Fall 2016-17 year. University of Toronto, Quick Facts. <https://www.utoronto.ca/about-u-of-t/quick-facts>

I live on campus

I live off campus

7 If you live on campus, what is your Hall of residence?

U of T Residence

None-U of T Residence

8 What is your GPA?

Between 1-2

Between 2-3

Between 3-4

9 How likely is it that you can find your ethno-nutritional food on campus?

Never

Rarely

Likely

Highly likely

Very Highly Likely

10 Would you go off campus in search of African food?

Yes

Rarely

No

11 If Yes, how far off campus would you go in search of African food?

≤ 10 Minutes

Between 10-20 minutes

≥ 30 Minutes

12 To what extent do you consider yourself knowledgeable about nutrition?

Low

Medium

High

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME

Appendix E: Guiding Qualitative Survey

Nutrition Protocols for Enhanced African International Students' Academic Achievement at the University of Toronto (St. George Campus).

Dear Respondent

I am carrying out a study on nutrition protocols, for enhanced African International Students' academic performance at the University of Toronto (St. George Campus). To achieve this, I have developed interview questions that will take at least an hour (60-90 minutes) and the information obtained will be of much significance to the study. Please note that this study is purely academic with no intentions of investigating into your private lives. Any findings obtained, will be treated with utmost confidentiality and anonymity the University of Toronto

has an ethical code that all researchers are obliged to follow when undertaking research. Please respond truthfully to the best of your knowledge. Please note that you can opt out the survey should you feel so.

Thank you in advance for your time.

1. What do you understand by the term nutrition?
2. What are some of the characteristics by which you determine nutritious foods on St. George campus?
3. Would you say that nutritious foods help you study better?
4. Please elaborate on your answer to the above question (3)
5. Which food services do you think the university should consider establishing to enrich your campus life?
6. Would you recommend the University of Toronto to your peers based on food services at the St. George campus?
7. What do you understand by the term academic performance?
8. How important is your academic performance in relation to your everyday happiness or satisfaction? Please elaborate on your response.
9. What are some of the challenges International Students find in accessing nutritious foods on campus?
10. In what ways can such challenges be mitigated to enable International Students feel better accommodated by the University of Toronto?
11. What message would you like to send to the University of Toronto Governing Council regarding food services at the St. George campus?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME

Appendix F: Appreciation Note to Participants



Friday, November 30, 2018

U of T African International Students
 c/o
 African Students Association
 University of Toronto
 40 Willcocks Street
 Toronto, Ontario, Canada
 M5S 1C6

Dear Participant,

RE: Thank You for your Participation

I am so delighted that you are interested in sharing your nutritional experiences at such a critical moment in our time at the University of Toronto. Thank you for your time and knowledge sharing.

Your responses will be anonymized and will be used to contribute to the growing literature on nutrition and academic achievement for students in postsecondary education. You will help inform researchers, practitioners and students on the nutritional experiences for African international university students.

Along with this thank you note, I have attached a consent letter for you to peruse before we meet for the interview. I encourage you to read it carefully and decide if you are still interested in participating in the study. At our meeting I will provide two printed copies for you to sign one of which will be yours to keep.

Your support is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Henry Ssali".

Henry Ssali
 MA Candidate, University of Toronto

Appendix G: Email Communication Trajectory with the Assistant Vice-President, Ancillary Services University of Toronto, St. George Campus

From: Anne Macdonald <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Friday, March 29, 2019 4:41 PM
To: Henry Ssali <[REDACTED]>
Cc: Michael Jeronimo <[REDACTED]>
Subject: RE: Food/Nutrition Policy/Practices

Dear Henry,

We are always happy to have feedback from students (or others) about menu choices that we might add to our menus. Currently, our 3 residences have student food/residence committees where those discussions regularly take place and form the basis of the annual menu planning process. On the rest of the campus, where we have our retail food court operations, we have had food committees come and go over the years and have not had an active committee for a few years – but we are changing this and seeking to revive this committee for the new academic year. So, initial feedback is gathered through these channels, occasional surveys, through informal feedback from our large staff (who receive requests directly from customers), through our culinary leadership team who spend time surveying the food “landscape” in the city and beyond to see what is popular, and so on.

Once we have specific ideas about adding certain menu items, we would explore feasibility. For example: sourcing and cost of raw materials, skill/knowledge of our chefs, whether any special equipment might be needed and whether we think the item will be popular. We are space constrained in many locations, so adding something usually means taking something else away, which would also need to be considered. We have the most flexibility for menu variation in our residences, which have the largest facilities, more staff and an easier time swapping out menus on a regular basis. We do menu “experiments” on occasion in other locations to test new offerings for short periods of time; if we find that the items are popular then they become permanent – this is what our team did with the Ramen menu that was tested last winter during reading week.

I’m copying our Director of Retail and Residential Dining on this reply – Michael is the one working on reviving our central food committee, and might be a good person for you to have a follow up conversation with.

Hope this helps! Have a lovely weekend.

Anne

Anne Macdonald, ARCT, BMus, MBA
Assistant Vice-President, Ancillary Services
University of Toronto, St. George campus
229 College Street, #204
Toronto, ON M5T 1R4
[REDACTED]

www.ancillary.utoronto.ca

From: Henry Ssali <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Friday, March 29, 2019 3:49 PM
To: Anne Macdonald <[REDACTED]>
Subject: RE: Food/Nutrition Policy/Practices

Dear Anne,

I hope your Friday is great and you are looking forward to a relaxing weekend.

I was unable to connect with the Dietician and Executive but I have a few follow up questions as I wrap up my research that I hope you can respond to below.

I am doing a study on the importance of the U of T offering more diverse ethnic food options to reflect our current students' population. I need some clarifications from your office.

What would it take for the university to offer more diverse ethnic food options among the forty-one (41) eateries on the St. George campus where the university oversees food services since 'Aramark's contract ended three years ago?

My study claims that diverse ethnic food options would promote Equity, Diversity and Inclusion among students than is currently the case especially with respect to International students.

In your view, is such a proposal feasible now that the U of T administers food services at the UTSG campus? Could the program be initially implemented as a pilot project in say one or two of the 41 food locations to gauge demand and get some feedback before implementing it campus-wide?

What in your view are the pros and cons of such an idea ("Diverse Ethnic Food Pilot Project")?

What major changes if any would be required to operationalise such an idea?

My study so far suggests that offering diverse ethnic food options on the UTSG campus would help the university to attract even more international students. In other words, it would offer some competitive advantage to U of T as a leader in higher education. I offer that such a project could translate in more international students choosing U of T over other schools. My assumptions arise from ten interviews I conducted among African international students and I would like to add your voice.

Any comments would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you so much Anne.

Best Regards,
Henry

From: Henry Ssali
Sent: Friday, March 09, 2018 9:25 AM
To: Anne Macdonald <[REDACTED]>
Subject: RE: Food/Nutrition Policy/Practices

Dear Anne,

Good morning and thank you very much for these resources. I will get back to you in the event that other follow-up questions arise.

Meanwhile could you please connect me to the dietician and Executive Chef?

Thank you so much for your prompt response and help.

Happy Friday ☺!

Best Regards,
Henry

From: Anne Macdonald
Sent: Friday, March 09, 2018 8:50 AM
To: Henry Ssali <[REDACTED]>
Subject: RE: Food/Nutrition Policy/Practices
Good morning Henry,

We have guidelines which were developed with our colleagues at the federated colleges, and the other campuses, some years ago. These are not “policy” as they have not gone through University governance, but we have operated under these conditions for quite a few years and have achieved pretty good compliance from divisions and student groups:

<http://www.food-beverage.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Food-Services-Operating-Principles.pdf>

<http://www.food-beverage.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Food-Services-Rules-and-Regulations.pdf>

Let me know if you have any follow up questions after you have a look at these – it may be helpful for you to have a chat with our dietician or Executive Chef, depending on what your specific questions are.

Kind regards,

Anne

Anne Macdonald, BMus ARCT MBA
Acting Chief Operating Officer, Property Services and Sustainability
Executive Director, Ancillary Services
University of Toronto
[REDACTED]

229 College Street, Suite 224A, Toronto, ON M5T 1R4

www.fs.utoronto.ca | www.ancillary.utoronto.ca

From: Henry Ssali
Sent: Thursday, March 08, 2018 11:20 AM
To: Anne Macdonald <[REDACTED]>
Subject: Food/Nutrition Policy/Practices

Dear Anne,

I hope you are having an amazing week.

I am doing research on U of T's food policy/practices. I am now aware that we have no official nutrition policy and am reaching out to you to find out if we have any acceptable practices that our food services providers follow? Could you please share that information with me?

Thank you so much.

Best Regards,

Henry

“If you do not intentionally include, you will unintentionally exclude.”– Joe Gerstandt

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Endnotes

ⁱ By the term “protocols” I mean operating principles, practices, rules and regulations pertaining to nutrition as well as the policies related to International Students in general and approved by the University of Toronto, Governing Council

ⁱⁱ Nutrition Protocols for Enhanced African International Students’ Academic Achievement at the University of Toronto (St. George Campus).

ⁱⁱⁱ Robinson, Jennifer. (2017, September 05). U of T ranked No.1 in Canada, one of world’s top 10 public universities <https://www.utoronto.ca/news/u-t-ranked-no-1-canada-one-world-s-top-10-public-universities>

^{iv} University of Toronto, Quick Facts. <https://www.utoronto.ca/about-u-of-t/quick-facts>

^v University of Toronto 2017-18 annual report of the Office of the Vice-President, International.

<https://global.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/UofT-FinalAR-2018.pdf>

^{vi} Loomes, S., & Croft, A. (2013). An investigation into the eating behaviour of international students studying at an Australian university: should we be concerned? *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, Vol. 35, No. 5, 483–494, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2013.825418>

^{vii} University of Toronto, Office of the Governing Council.

http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/Governing_Council/policies.htm

^{viii} Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policies

^{ix} According to a google search for “African restaurants at St. George campus”

https://www.google.ca/search?q=african+restaurant+at+st.+george+campus&rlz=1C1GGRV_enCA752CA752&oq=african+restaurant+at+st.+george+campus&aqs=chrome..69i57.26534j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

^x <https://www.facebook.com/groups/252863019764/>

^{xi} In this paper I use “academic achievement”, “academic attainment”, and “academic success” interchangeably

^{xii} Marvel Database <https://marvel.fandom.com/wiki/Category:Wakandans>

^{xiii} Created with mapchart.net <https://mapchart.net/africa.html>