Rodriguez, Lorenzo: Nutrition on a college campus

Proposal: My research proposal is going to revolve around nutrition and the perception of campus foods from both students and Campus Auxiliary Services (CAS). It is no surprise that the common student across American universities receives an inadequate amount of nutrients in his or her diet. I want to find out what students really think about the campus food here at Geneseo and find out why this malnourishment may be taking place on campus. In addition, I would like to interview CAS and see what they have to say about campus foods and heir convenience/benefits.

Interview questions

Students:

1. Name and year?
2. How do you view the nutrition and caloric content of campus food?
3. Do you believe CAS offers enough options for those with restrictions?
4. How often do you read the nutrition labels on foods before you purchase them?
5. Have you gained weight since the start of college?
6. How do you feel about the pricing of foods on campus?
7. Does time play an instrumental role in your dining choices?
8. Food insecurity is defined as limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods. Do you have food insecurity?
9. Does campus food in any way cause you stress?

CAS:

1. What is your name and what position do you hold in CAS?
2. What sorts of foods do you believe students purchase most frequently? Why?
3. How would you describe the nutrition and caloric contents of prepared hot foods in campus dining halls?
4. Is there a balance or equilibrium between the healthy and unhealthy foods in Campus dining halls?
5. Can students maintain a healthy, and adequate diet when eating regularly on campus?
6. How do foods on campus provide efficiency when dealing with the common student’s schedule?
7. How do foods on campus cater towards students with food restrictions or preferences?
8. How frequently do students reach out to CAS to voice their comments or concerns?
9. Do you think the foods are adequately priced?
10. Many students voiced that finding healthy options on campus are a struggle. Especially eating hot foods that have no nutrition label. Comments?
11. There are limited options for students with food restrictions such as kosher, vegetarian, vegan, allergies, or health concerns. (Greatest concern is no labels on hot foods).
12. The online menu does a poor job of providing details regarding restrictions and nutrients.

Scholarly Background

In the University setting, students tend to blame the campus food as a contributing element of their stress, weight-gain, and lack of nutrient intake. Aside from important aspects of college such as academics and a social life, other vital sectors of living such as an adequate diet of balanced fruits and vegetables are not regularly met within the realm of campus life (Food Weekly News. 2011). It is a common perception on these campuses that students have “…relatively unlimited access to highly palatable, calorically dense yet nutritionally deficient foods…in conjunction with the limited availability of healthier food options” (Webb, et al. 2013). This unbalanced selection of food options is a common theme and speculation in the dining halls here at SUNY Geneseo as well. My goal during this research was to reveal the perception of campus food and nutrition from Geneseo Campus Auxiliary Services’ (CAS) as opposed to the students’ perception of CAS food.

In my effort to discover at least an example of students’ thoughts toward campus food, I interviewed approximately twenty students within Geneseo’s wide demographic and asked them a series of generalized, open-ended questions. Some of these students chose to be a part of my film, while as many requested not to appear on screen.

Through my interviews, I discovered that many of these students believed that they were in distress as a result of food insecurity. Food insecurity is defined as “limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods” (Lin, et al. 2013) and is experienced most frequently amongst low income families. “Food insecurity has negative effects on academic performance and creates mental distress” which can most certainly become a heavy onus for college students and hinder their expectations and results. (Lin, et al. 2013). “You can’t really wait in a line during the day most of the time to get food” said Geneseo sophomore Harrison Angelini. During the course of the day, students are busy with classes, assignments and projects, sports, clubs, and other campus activities. They believe that they either have insufficient time to prepare meals or “they possess inadequate cooking skills” (Gaines, et al. 2014). It became obvious that the financial component of campus dining had also contributed to overall stress. Students in these limited time situations tend to purchase “costly convenience foods or ready prepared foods more often” (Gaines, et al. 2014), and again, these foods tend to be high in caloric value, but contain little nutritional value. According to Geneseo sophomore Xavier Bodensieck, “campus food nutritional content is low.” The Dietary Guidelines for Americans defines healthy foods as ‘those that provided more nutrients and fewer calories’ (Drewnowski and Fulgoni. 2007). When asked about access to preferred foods on campus, Geneseo freshman Denis Hartnett said, “I miss vegetables. I feel like I don’t get enough opportunity to eat vegetables.”
In a survey done on Yale University’s college campus, students were asked about how importantly they viewed nutrition labels on campus foods. The majority of students reported that “the calorie and ingredient information were the most important aspects of the nutrition information cards, followed by fat content” (Martinez, et al. 2012). “When you’re trying to be conscientious about what you’re eating, its hard to find the exact nutrition facts” said Geneseo sophomore Kelly Kulakowski. “Individuals who frequently read nutrition labels tend to both value healthy eating and engage in healthy dietary practices” (Graham and Laska. 2012), but this seems to be increasingly difficult at Geneseo. Another primary concern amongst students had to do with dietary options for students with dietary preferences or restrictions. Reasons for restrictions could include allergies, religion or sensitivity. Kulakowski tends to have high cholesterol and needs to keep a close eye on her saturated fat intake- a task that is very difficult in Geneseo dining halls. Dining around campus can sometimes be risky because “allergies to foods such as milk, eggs, peanuts and tree nuts can have a significant effect on people’s quality of life and physical functioning” (Silva, et al. 2013). Sophomore Yoran Weinstock explained that CAS “[doesn’t] have a lot of kosher foods” and has only one “dedicated” kosher station in the upstairs Letchworth Dining hall. In general, it seemed that students were unsatisfied with the dietary accommodations supplied by CAS.

In attempt to shed some light on this issue, I decided to interview CAS’ Coordinator of Health and Wellness Heather Carerra and CAS’ Marketing Manager Becky Stewart. During the interview, I asked the women open-ended questions much like the ones I asked the students in attempt to make an un-biased attempt at obtaining simplistic responses. The CAS representatives made a positive effort to explain how the campus foods cater to the students’ wide demographic and both their schedules and dietary necessities. It is a shared belief between both Carerra and Stewart that Geneseo dining halls have an “equal balance of both healthy and unhealthy foods.” The representatives touched upon how they respond to students who do come forth to voice their concerns and explained that most students who do visit the health office have a “positive experience.” A main mission for CAS is to obtain feedback from students so they can plan and prepare in a more efficient and sufficient way that is beneficial to students.

References Cited:


Written Reflection on Final Video
While forming my research topic, I realized that my thoughts were very jumbled and inconsistent. I knew that I wanted to hone in on the student perception of campus food, but I realized that in doing so, I would only have portrayed one very biased and subjective perspective. Throughout our Ethnography and Film course, we had the opportunity to watch some historically significant ethnographic films including *The Ax Fight* (1971) by Tim Asch and Napoleon Chagnon and *Dead Birds* (1965) by Robert Gardner. These films, through a narrative styled documentary, portrayed the way an indigenous people lived, communicated, and handled disputes. Over the years, these films have painted a pretty vivid portrait in the minds of the millions who have viewed them. The messages that were illustrated by Jay Ruby in *The Cinema of Tim Asch* and *Robert Gardner and Anthropological Cinema*, both critiques of these films, strongly conveyed that film has exceptional power. Generally, the viewer will only see what the film maker wants them to see, so a film maker can paint a people in any light that he desires: good or bad. This idea is extremely true with the Yanomami people of Venezuela portrayed in *The Ax Fight*. In this film, the indigenous Yanomami handle disputes through a very organized and ritualized form of combat. To a viewer with no previous knowledge of this people, this portrayal of Yanomami culture could be viewed as chaotic and savage. Asch and Chagnon did an overall good job of portraying the Yanomami people with decency by illustrating what it was that they were doing on screen in full respect to their customs and culture.

While creating my research topic, I decided that I wanted to make my Ethnographic film as unbiased as I can by demonstrating both sides of the spectrum. In order to successfully do this, I would have to interview not only the students at Geneseo who are consuming the campus foods, but also the Campus Auxiliary Services (CAS) workers who prepared the foods. My final research goals were to reveal the perception of campus food and nutrition from Geneseo Campus Auxiliary Services (CAS) as opposed to the students’ perception of CAS food. I asked approximately 20 students, most of whom were friends or classmates, a series of open ended questions regarding campus foods and recorded those who would participate in my film. My style, I felt, was slightly different than most, but I felt as though it conveyed my research successfully. I found that while creating the student based section of the film, it was difficult to include each of their responses in full. In order to save time, I had to cut small segments of their responses and manually place them in the video. I recognize that because the questions and answers are not present in their entirety and unedited, I can't consider my film "objective." However, I tried my best to portray both sides of the spectrum by interviewing CAS and asking them very similarly open ended questions. I chose to interview CAS' Health and Nutrition Coordinator Heather Carerra and Marketing Manager Becky Stewart. This was a very simple task to achieve because both representatives were very open to the idea.

For the research methods, outside sources, and strategies that I couldn’t include in my film, I placed in my written wiki space. I definitely feel like I was able to portray more through text then I could through film, however, I believe that both my wiki space and film compliment one another, nonetheless. The style I chose was good for organizing each specific question and each individual informant’s answers and I think I successfully accomplished my goals with this project.
