

HFSSM Food Insecurity Survey Snapshot

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Prepared for UASU Executive Committee by
Department of Research and Advocacy



Overview

The 10-question Health Canada Household Food Security Survey Module Adult Scale (HFSSM) is a standard instrument for measuring food insecurity in Canada, and is functionally identical to the American equivalent.

In recent years, the HFSSM Adult Scale has been employed on studies of food insecurity among post-secondary students in Canada. The UASU included the HFSSM Adult Scale in the [2019 Annual Survey](#) (n=3944), and in the ongoing 2022 Annual Survey (n=4039+ at time of writing).

These two UASU surveys may be the largest studies of post-secondary food insecurity in Canada. The 2019 survey took place shortly before the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The new survey speaks to the state of student food insecurity after three unusual years, encompassing the height of the pandemic in Canada, institutional recovery efforts, and — most recently — record inflation impacting the cost of living.

Key Findings

The rate of severe food insecurity has significantly increased since 2019.

FOOD SECURITY STATUS	HFSSM ADULT SCALE	% RESPONDENTS (2022)	% RESPONDENTS (2019)
Food secure	No affirmative responses	57%	56%
Marginal food insecure	No more than 1 affirmative response	9%	11%
Moderate food insecure	2 to 5 affirmative responses	18%	20%
Severe food insecure	6 or more affirmative responses	16%	13%

The 2019 survey noted high rates of severe food insecurity among gender minorities, first-generation students, mature students, students who parent, and Indigenous students.

The 2022 survey collected a different set of demographic data. In the 2022 survey, severe food insecurity was most common among international students (23%), disabled students (29%), transgender students (25%), non-binary students and other gender minorities (19%), Black students (20%), and Indigenous students (24%, up from 19-20% in 2019, with Indigenous women most commonly affected).

There was also major variation within faculties: severe food insecurity was highest in Open Studies (21%), Nursing (20%), Law (36%), Medicine and Dentistry (20%), Arts (21%), and Campus Saint-Jean (22%). However, moderate and/or severe food insecurity is common across all demographics and faculties.