



Undergraduate Association Report on Food Insecurity (2023-2024)

Undergraduate Association Food Security Committee

We, the UA Committee on Food Security, aim to tackle one of the most pressing issues on MIT's campus: students' ability to access and afford food during the semester. Established in the Fall of 2023, the Food Security committee has done work to quantify food insecurity at MIT and kickstarted new initiatives to lessen the impact that food insecurity has on nearly 10% of undergraduates at MIT.

Acknowledgements

The UA and DormCon would like to thank our friends in the Department of Student Life, the Student Organizations, Leadership and Engagement Office, and Institutional Research Office for the valuable and constructive suggestions during the planning and development of this work. Additionally, we would like to extend a special thanks to Dr. Jonathan Gruber and Stu Schmill for their guidance and insight. Both Dr. Gruber's and Stu's willingness to give their time so generously has been very much appreciated. Finally, we would like to thank Kate McCarthy from the CARE Team, Jimmy Doan from the Office of Student Wellbeing, and the countless student volunteers who aided in the ideation, creation, and execution of this project. Without all of you none of this would have been possible.

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Executive Summary

Key Findings

1. Contrary to popular belief, there is no evidence to suggest that students on meal plans are any less likely to be food insecure than students who don't have meal plans.
2. Students who experience food insecurity are more likely to need additional financial resources compared to their counterparts. However, when asked whether a lack of time or lack of money was the leading cause of food problems, the population was split (forty-one versus fifty-one percent, respectively). Furthermore, there's no evidence to suggest that students that experience food insecurity spend more money on food or buy more expensive meals compared to their peers.
3. From the perspective of students, the effective TechCASH to USD exchange rate is roughly two dollars in TechCASH to three dollars in USD. That is, for every dollar that MIT gives students in TechCASH, the perceived value to the average student is roughly about sixty-six to seventy-five cents.

Recommendations

The UA, in partnership with DormCon, DSL, and the ARM Coalition, should offer a bulk delivery service through the new grocer, Concord Market, which would be run, managed, and operated by dorms. The service would deliver food every week to participating students who could then receive discounted and/or subsidized meals based on criteria to be determined by the ARM Coalition. By accepting TechCash as a payment option for its food services, this initiative would seamlessly integrate into the existing food ecosystem and expand the accessibility of TechCash to more locations, further enhancing its convenience and utility for students.

MIT should extend the locations in which TechCASH can be used. MIT should allow TechCASH to be used anywhere on campus where food is served, and in popular food vendors near campus as well. This would homogenize geographic access to food on campus and solve the recurrent issue of not having affordable food options on the East side of campus.

Finally, when comparing the meal plan utilization percentage and cost-per-meal of \$16.87 to the reported average around \$14 a meal, it's clear that more work should be done to bring these numbers closer to parity. A possible solution to this would be to implement a system in which any food vendor on campus that accepts TechCASH could accept swipes at a preestablished swipe-per-dollar exchange rate.

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Background and Objectives

Previous Work

2017-2018

Survey data show between 2-8% of graduate students and 13% of undergraduates have trouble accessing food.

The Food Insecurity Solutions Working Group met throughout the fall 2017-2018 semester to explore the nature of the problem at MIT and to identify possible solutions. Students report not having the skills or knowledge to budget effectively or cook for themselves. Emergency funds were offered to food insecure undergraduate and graduate students throughout the semester.

A new program called SwipeShare was launched, which allows students to donate unused guest passes for campus dining halls.

A new coalition was formed called Accessing Resources MIT, which was charged with ensuring that all MIT students have access to the resources they need to be successful personally, academically, physically, and socially.

Key recommendations from fall session:

- Start a new [low-cost grocery store](#) on campus
- Fully committing to resources like SwipeShare and student emergency funds
- Further analyze dining and food payment options across campus
- Improve education on financial literacy, budgeting, and cooking nutritious food that works within a student's budget
- Work towards reducing stigma about seeking help and increasing awareness of the resources on campus

2022 Fall

The Division of Student Life (DSL) food security programs during the holiday break and IAP continue to provide eligible undergraduate students living on or near campus with resources to help offset meal expenses.

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Graduate students are reminded that resources are available to make food more accessible and affordable, including over winter break, by applying for [Graduate Student Food Resources](#).

[SwipeShare](#) data for the 22-23 Academic Year show that nearly 1700 swipes were donated and provided to students who needed them.

UA Farmer's Market initiative - The UA Wellbeing and Innovation committees work together with the Food Security Action Team to explore the possibility of a Farmer's Market on campus.

[Daily Table](#) Grab and Go Event - MIT students who live in cook-for-yourself communities get a chance to sample affordable groceries from Daily Table at a "Grab-and-Go" grocery event held on September 12th.

Grad Food Resource Fair - With the support of a MindHandHeart Grant, the Food Security Action Team (FSAT) and the Graduate Student Council DEI committee collaborate on the recent Grad Student Food Resource Fair, dispersing food and personal hygiene resources to graduate students. Student attendees enter raffles, connect with resources, receive recipes, discuss grocery shopping habits, and make overnight oats with Graduate Residential Education.

Food Justice, Resilience, and Entrepreneurship Event - On November 29th, Chef Tracy Chang, owner of [PAGU](#) in Cambridge, delivers an [immersive lecture](#) exploring topics from the science of noodles to innovative food security solutions in the Boston area. Led by the Asian American Initiative, with support from the Office of Sustainability, the Women's & Gender Studies Program, the Office of Intercultural Engagement, Graduate Residential Education, Office of Student Wellbeing, and Sloan DEI, this event caps off a series of hands-on explorations around Asian American food justice and agriculture.

DormCon and the UA host a food security forum with FSAT on December 6th, creating a space for students to discuss food security on campus and increase awareness about resources to help students access food.

2023 Spring/Summer

DSL provides over 750 eligible on-campus undergraduate students 15 meal swipes as part of the Proactive Meal Swipe program. During Winter Break, over 400 students are issued daily Grubhub stipends to help supplement their meals over winter break. As part of the IAP Dining Dollars Program, approximately 1,400 undergraduate students received \$125 in TechCash each week to supplement food costs.

With the [closure of the Stratton Student Center \(W20\)](#) for renovations, DSL offers on-campus students free grocery delivery from [Daily Table](#). The delivery costs are covered by DSL until the end of the Spring 2023

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semester on Friday, May 26, 2023, for grocery orders totaling \$25.00 or more within 2.5 miles of the Daily Table Central Square location (Nota bene: This service is no longer available as of the end of the fall semester, 2023).

In December, Sloan establishes the Student Life Office fund. The fund is a resource for students to be able to participate fully in social parts of the Sloan experience and be more food secure. It offers \$500 in Tech Cash as well as meal vouchers to Sloan students who request food assistance.

The Office of Graduate Education (OGE), in partnership with FSAT, hosts the Spring Grad Food Resource Fair on April 10, 2023. The Ombuds Office, Dining Services, GradSupport, the GSC and other offices share information, resources, and free food items with students who attended the event.

The FSAT communications group partners with the [Health Promotion Working Group](#) (HPWG) to provide on-campus students a resource guide which includes free activities in Boston, food resources, and support services available over the summer. The summer resource guide launches early June on the [DoingWell](#) website.

DormCon Dining Chairs work on [a map of culturally relevant grocery stores](#) in the MIT area, so students can more easily find the food that they want.

Objectives

The purpose of this survey is to determine why certain students are food insecure; i.e., whether they are limited more by time or money in terms of not having sufficient access to food. We also aim to gauge student opinion on the use of TechCASH as a means to supplement food-insecure students (as opposed to cash or other forms of food-specific support). The ultimate goal of this data is to inform decision makers where resources would best be used to end food insecurity on campus and to get a rough estimate as to how much that would cost.

Methodology

The target population of the survey was all undergraduates at MIT. We attempted to bias the survey responses in favor of undergraduates who live in cook-for-yourself (CFY) dorms, with the hypothesis that students in CFY dorms are more likely to experience food insecurity compared to those on a meal plan. To achieve this, we collaborated with the presidents of CFY dorms to publicize the form and encourage CFY students to fill the survey out. However, because more than half of our data was acquired during in-person publicizing events, the effects of this biasing was negligible. As evidenced by a relatively even mix of CFY and dining hall dorm students as survey respondents as well as the survey replicating key statistics already known by the Institute, the survey sample was well distributed and representative of the undergraduate student body.

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The survey was composed of four sections: General Dining, Food Insecurity, Food Barriers, and Meal Plan Preferences. After completing the first two sections, survey participants had the option to answer more questions (i.e. proceed to the Food Barriers section) or exit the survey.

The General Dining section (five questions) collected basic information about the survey participant including their student status, if they were on a MIT (or alternative) meal plan, what their estimated cost-per-meal was, and their expected need (i.e. how much additional money) in order to eat at least two meals a day (NB. If responses were more than 3 times the median of the average meal—more than \$42 to eat at least two meals a day— they were deemed outliers and excluded from subsequent calculations).

The Food Insecurity section (seven questions) collected information about the survey participants' food insecurity status. Using questions adapted from the U.S. Household Food Security Survey Module (See Appendix), this screened students to separate respondents who were not likely to experience food insecurity from the target population. For the purposes of this survey, respondents were classified as “Food Insecure” if, in response to the the following questions, their answers match the below criteria:

In the last semester, did you ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?

If survey participants selected **yes** to the above question AND in response to the following question:

How often did this happen?

If survey participants selected **More than once a week** OR

In response to the following question:

'I worried whether my food would run out before I got money to buy more.'

How true is this statement with regard to your food situation

If survey participants selected **Often true** OR

In response to the following question:

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'The food I bought just didn't last, and I didn't have money to get more.'

How true is this statement with regard to your food situation

If survey participants selected **Often true**.

We found that when using these metrics 10.3% of respondents matched the criteria to be considered food insecure. When compared to previous Institute numbers estimating food insecurity on campus (see Previous Work), the criteria we used to determine food insecurity seems consistent and reasonable.

The Food Barriers section (two questions) collected information on what respondents thought were the biggest contributors to their food problems. This question was presented as a binary (i.e. either not enough time or not enough money) to elucidate what respondents thought was the key cause of their food problems. To allow for additional commentary and nuance, there was a text box in which respondents could further explain their choice and add additional information.

The Meal Plan Section (seventeen questions) collected information on respondents' willingness to trade time versus money with regard to their food situation. This section was structured in a revealed preference format to understand how effective potential solutions to campus food insecurity might be and what students' reception to such solutions would entail. Additionally, this section collected data on the perceived value of TechCASH to students.

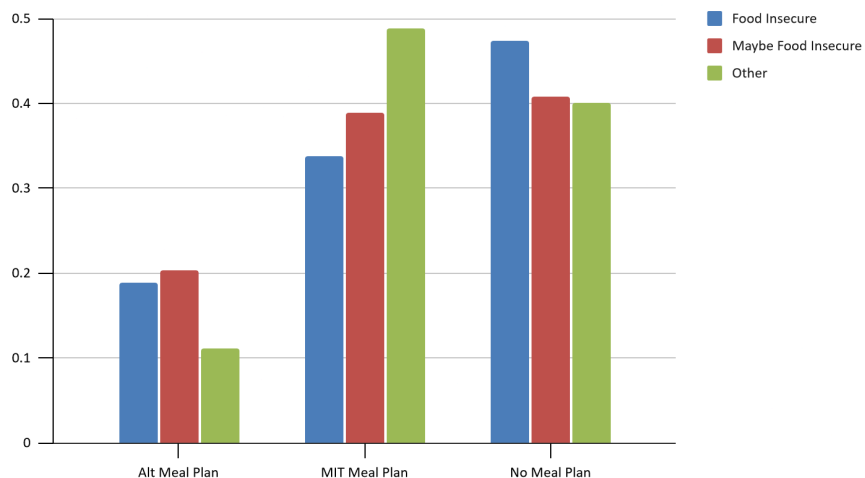
We administered the survey over a timespan of 3-4 weeks during the month of March 2024. The survey was sent to all undergraduates on March 6, 2023. Multiple emails were sent, both through the undergrads@mit.edu email, as well as reminder emails through dorm presidents. Two in-person publicizing events were held through the UA to encourage students to fill out the form (March 15th and 21st).

Data analysis was performed using Qualtrics. Of 4660 undergraduate students, 496 students (10.6 %) responded to the survey. To reach a 95% confidence interval, it was determined that the critical number of students needed was 355. Given 496 students completed the survey, the survey had a 4.16% margin of error.

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Results

Cook-For-Yourself Compared to Dining Plans

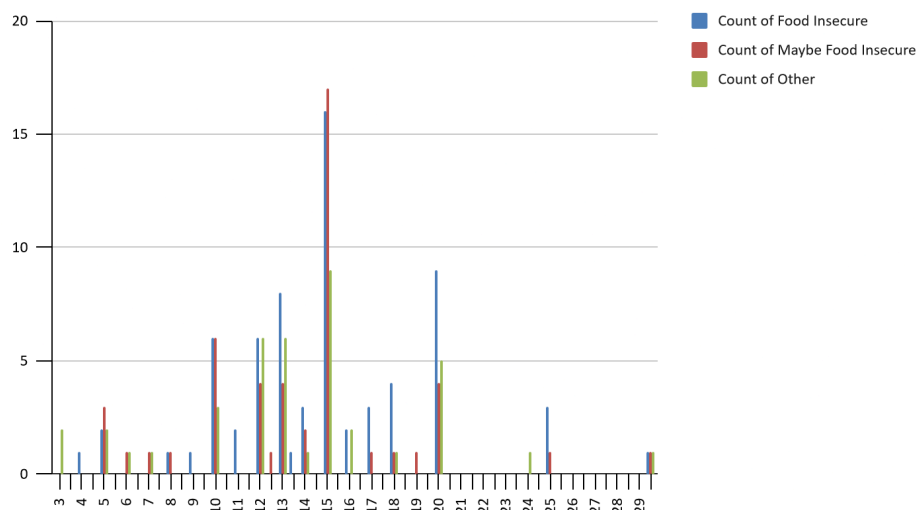


The data collected above divided students into three groups based on their dining plan status: MIT meal plan, meal plan provided by a fraternity, sorority, or independent living group (FSILG), or having no meal plan. Using the process described in the methodology, the students were then categorized as either Food Insecure, Maybe Food Insecure, or Other based on their survey responses.

The findings showed that students from all groups fell into all food security categories at similar relative rates, leading to a P-value of 0.428 (high randomization).

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Outside Meal Costs



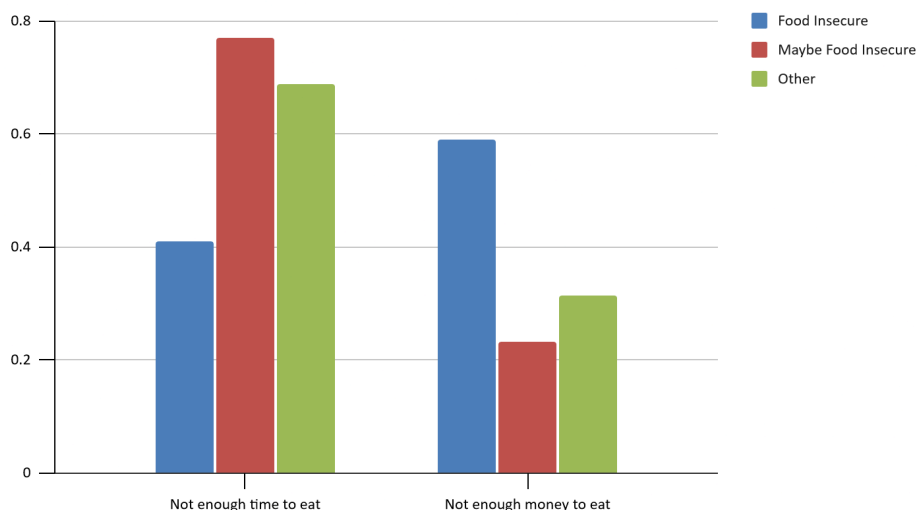
Students were asked how much, on average, their non-MIT dining hall meals cost. It is significant to note this question was heavily biased towards “takeout” foods, rather than cook-for-yourself meals.

This data follows the same methodology of separating students based on their status as Food Insecure, Maybe Food Insecure, or Other, of which there were 69, 49, and 41 respondents, respectively. Responses ranged from \$3 to \$29.5. The P-value was 0.428.

The median meal cost for the Food Insecure and Maybe Food Insecure groups was both \$15, with a standard deviation of 4.66 and 4.78, respectively. The Other group reported spending \$13, with a standard deviation of 5.39.

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Money versus Time



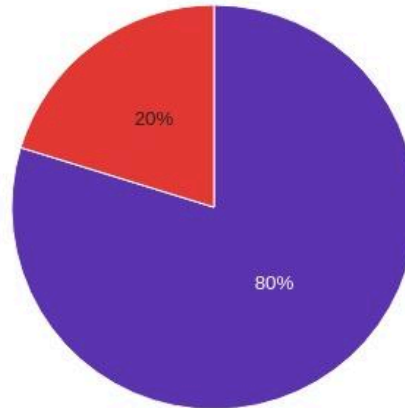
For students identified as food insecure, 41 percent felt the biggest source of their “food problems” was finding time to eat, while 59 percent felt that it was spending the money. Conversely, for moderately food insecure students, those percentages were 76.9 percent and 23.1 percent. Other students remained, with 68.8 versus 31.3 percent identifying time and monetary problems, respectively.

Of the comments that were left in the free response sections, 31 out of 57 mentioned time (54%), 14 out of 57 mentioned money (25%) and 19 out of 57 mentioned geographical/location issues (33%).

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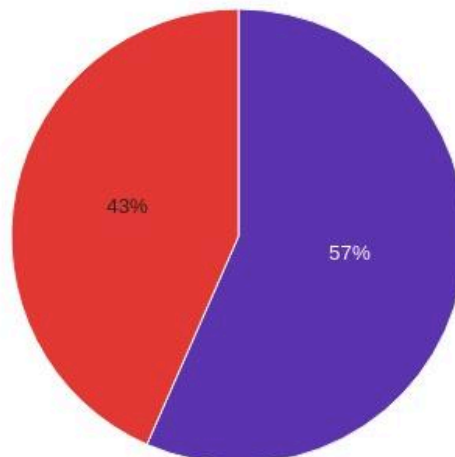
TechCash Value Proposition

Q26 - Consider the following options: Option A: Receive an additional \$15 in TechCASH a week for food-related expenses (resets each week). Option B: Receive an additional \$15 in cash a week for food-related expenses (resets each week). Please select the option that you would be more inclined to choose:



● Option B ● Option A

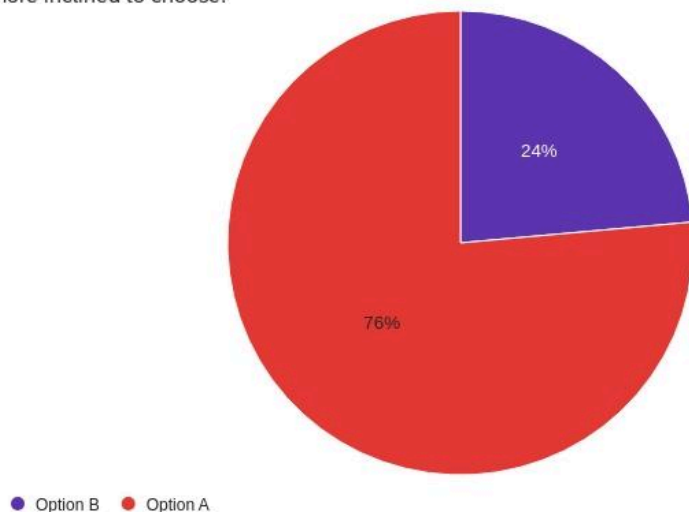
Q28 - Consider the following options: Option A: Receive an additional \$15 in TechCASH a week for food-related expenses (resets each week). Option B: Receive an additional \$13 in cash a week for food-related expenses (resets each week). Please select the option that you would be more inclined to choose:



● Option B ● Option A

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Q30 - Consider the following options: Option A: Receive an additional \$15 in TechCASH a week for food-related expenses (resets each week). Option B: Receive an additional \$10 in cash a week for food-related expenses (resets each week). Please select the option that you would be more inclined to choose:



As seen in the figures above, most students don't think TechCASH has the same value as normal currency. Our estimates, albeit crude, suggest that the perceived exchange rate is around 66 to 86 cents (USD) for every TechCASH dollar. Of note is that for students that were identified as Food Insecure, the perceived value is slightly closer to parity (63.2% chose Option B when for Question 26 and 63.2% chose Option A for question 28 which puts the perceived exchange rate at 0.86 to 1 dollar (USD) for every TechCASH dollar).

Discussion

Meal Plan vs Cook For Yourself

When discussing food insecurity at MIT in relation to other colleges and universities, one proposed solution is to require that all students be on a meal plan. However, in the eyes of many students, this is seen as the nuclear option. This policy would be anathema to MIT's longstanding tradition of giving students autonomy. Furthermore, while this is the most expensive (see Economic Considerations) proposed solution to combating food insecurity, there's no evidence to suggest this would have any effect on reducing MIT's unique food problem. As seen by the high P-values when relating meal plan ownership to food insecurity status, the lack of statistical significance is indicative of a high level of randomization in the data, i.e. that there was little correlation between a student's meal plan status and their level of food security.

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Another potential solution is to create an internal food service that could work with the ARM Coalition, DSL, and Concord Market to provide subsidized meals for food insecure students. Given the unique character of each dorm, a dorm-tailored model would ensure various aspects of dorm culture and norms could be honored without sacrificing service to students. This initiative would provide a reliable customer base for the grocery service, addressing students' time constraints and cost concerns by offering a convenient and potentially cheaper alternative to traditional food purchasing methods.

Food Insecurity and Finances

Over the last several years MIT has tracked food insecurity and its causes (see “Previous Work”). While MIT has definitely changed since then, the causes behind food insecurity have not. That said, aggregate food insecurity has decreased from roughly 13% to 10% largely in part to increased focus from the Institute on this issue.

Not having enough time, not having enough money, and not having a food location nearby have remained steady as the big three possible contributors to food problems. In addition to these causes, one of the consistent hypotheses for food insecurity being a persistent issue on campus is student’s management, or lack thereof, of their finances. Yet when looking at the data, financial illiteracy among food insecure students doesn’t seem to be the culprit. While programming around personal finances would likely have little-to-no detrimental effects for students at MIT, our findings suggest that Food Insecure students are no less frugal than their counterparts, so spending should not be considered a major contributor to their food insecurity. Simply put, if given the same financial resources, the data suggests that our sample of students would have a similar rate of food availability.

TechCASH

As seen above, the lack of perceived value likely has many causes, chief among them being the apparent dearth of locations that accept TechCASH on and near campus. While students who purchase items using TechCASH enjoy tax-exemption, the vendors who accept this option are severely limited. It is important to note that this survey was conducted while there was no on-campus grocer, so that likely exacerbated the already negative sentiment toward TechCASH. Many students expressed sentiments in the open response sections that lamented how “expensive” or “overpriced” the locations that did accept TechCASH were.

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Economic Considerations

Option 1 - Everyone on Meal Plan

From the results from the survey we can see that 34.7% (95% CI: 30.9% - 39.0%) of students aren't on any type of meal plan. As discussed above, there's no evidence to suggest that mandating that students be on a meal plan would do anything to alleviate food insecurity on campus. That said, we were to estimate the cost of adding these students to a medium sized meal plan (160 swipes a semester), it would cost the Institute anywhere from \$7,697,332.08 to \$9,810,325.20 annually (this calculation doesn't include the effect inflation has on the price of meal plans).

Despite common beliefs, adding everyone to the meal plan would not result in any meaningful decrease in the price of meal plans. With the high cost of labor in the Cambridge area and MIT's living wage policy, plus the additional dining facilities and staff that would be required to increase capacity, things would more or less equal out. Furthermore, the increase in expenses such as food cost, operating costs, and the additional wear and tear (and subsequent increase in repair and maintenance cost) would cause any cost-reducing effects of increased utilization to be negligible at best.

Option 2 - Weekly Allowance for All Students on Financial Aid

Because we have no data on the relationship between food insecurity and a student's financial situation, it would be hard to justify only targeting lower income students. In the interest of fairness, MIT would have to give the same food allowance to all students on financial aid (~2700 students). Assuming a net subsidy of around \$100 a week per student (roughly one additional meal a day), this would work out to around 9,180,000 annually.

Option 3 - Weekly Allowance for Food Insecure Students

From the survey we saw that students who were food insecure said they would need an additional \$20.30 (95% CI: \$17.69 to \$22.85) a day to eat at least two meals daily. Taking this approach, it would cost MIT an additional \$2,020,821.40 to \$2,610,275.23 annually to implement. This option would cost less than a third of the previous option (~74% less than Option 1).

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Option 4 - Increased TechCASH Infrastructure and Subsidized In-house Delivery Service

Because money, location, and geographical access to food are all common barriers to students, a combined solution that addresses all of these seems like a reasonable approach. MIT could invest resources into expanding the locations in which TechCASH could be used to include all food vendors on campus. Admittedly, it's hard to calculate how much this would cost.

Let's assume a rather extreme 10% transaction fee in addition to a lump sum \$500,000 to cover any miscellaneous transitional expenses. Additionally, let's assume MIT subsidized the meals of students who are food insecure at a rate of 50%. Finally, in lieu of aggregate numbers on annual student spending at food vendors, let's assume a modest \$10 million in annual gross income among all the vendors combined (this only includes income directly generated from student spending, not departmental spending on catering or club spending). The cost from everything excluding the subsidized student meals would sum to around 1.5 million annually.

If all food insecure students bought 14 meals a week, this would total to about \$3,515,916 annually (~60% less than Option 1). This price would fluctuate depending on how this substudy affected students' consumption habits, but given the gratuitous assumptions in reaching this figure, in practice this option would more or less cost the same as Option 2.

Conclusion and Further Work

The purpose of this report was to determine why certain students are food insecure; i.e., whether they are limited more by time or money in terms of not having sufficient access to food. We also wanted to gauge student opinion on the use of TechCASH as a means to supplement food-insecure students (as opposed to cash or other forms of food-specific support). We found that:

1. Students on meal plans were no less likely to be food insecure than students who don't have meal plans.
2. Students who experience food insecurity are more likely to need additional financial resources compared to their counterparts.
3. There's no evidence to suggest that students that experience food insecurity spend more money on food or buy more expensive meals compared to their peers.

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4. From the perspective of students, the effective TechCASH to USD exchange rate is roughly two dollars in TechCASH to three dollars in USD.
5. The estimated cost to end food insecurity on campus ranges from two to ten million dollars annually.

Despite this being the most comprehensive survey regarding food insecurity on MIT's campus to date, there are still gaps in our knowledge. If we were to redo this survey in the future, more information about students' living communities and financial situation would be essential in informing subsequent efforts to allocate resources to the students who most need them.

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Appendix

Reports/Resources

<https://doingwell.mit.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/FISWGReport-2017.pdf>

<https://doingwell.mit.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Food-Security-History-and-Overview.pdf>

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/media/8282/short2012.pdf>

Miscellaneous

Meal Plan	Semester Cost	Guest Passes	Dining Dollars	Available to Class Years Living:	
				In a Required Residence	In a Cook for Yourself Residence
Any 21	\$3,608.25	8	optional	1,2,3,4	1,2,3,4
Block 225	\$3,608.25	included in total	\$150	1,2,3,4	1,2,3,4
190	\$3,114.50	included in total	optional	2,3,4	1,2,3,4
160	\$2,780.80	included in total	optional	3,4	1,2,3,4
90	\$1,622.70	included in total	optional	N/A	1,2,3,4
60	\$1,107.60	included in total	optional	N/A	1,2,3,4

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Open Ended Questions

Takeaways from text box

- The stud food is very overpriced
 - "begging you to put cheap food in the stud" in the level of Dunkin
 - "can't afford to keep buying \$15 meals from the stud"
- Time and money go hand in hand
- Classes (or schoolwork/extracurriculars) overlap with meal times and MIT dining times -> not enough time to eat
 - "I don't have time to preprepare meals every week and then when I'm on campus, I can't afford any real meal during my hour for lunch so I just miss lunch fairly often."
 - "No time between classes, can't grab something quick and nutritious and affordable from stud anymore except at weird hours before 4 or 6"
 - Back to back plans -> resort to packaged food or bananas
 - "even when I have food cooked, I don't always have time to eat it" (!)
- Groceries and cooking is time-consuming
- Can't eat every meal because forced meal plan is expensive and no money left
 - "how financially ridiculous even the smallest meal plan is"
 - Meal plans are very expensive so if you have a meal plan you have no money (e.g. refund) to spare
 - Accepting meal plan tap at stata:
 - "It's hard to find time to go to the dining hall, and I wish my meal plan taps were accepted at Stata or other on-campus eateries. I don't want to spend money elsewhere, so sometimes I end up just not eating."
- There is no non-dining food at dinner time
 - "The only option on campus for dinner is teado and due to my allergies I can't eat there for a meal."
 - **Only 2 places to use swipes at lunch time, and only 1 place to use money/techcash at dinner time, none of those are on the east side**

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- Skipping a meal can have different interpretations - skipping breakfast is considered "skipping a meal" for some form respondents
 - At least 4 such responses
 - "It takes too much time to plan and eat 3 meals a day."
 - Worth telling people that they can eat just 2 meals a day lol - it helps when what you have to do feels less overwhelming
 - Some people may have medically necessary reasons to eat 3 meals a day
 - "i need to eat 3 meals a day but can't get the highest meal plan"
- Extremely close difference between money and time
 - Prioritizing classes unless "terribly hungry"
 - Need a way to cook and make food last longer
- >1 h ordeal to get groceries
 - "don't set aside time to go grocery shopping until I have literally nothing left to eat"
- Health+time+money tradeoff
 - "I spend around 8h/ week cooking for myself because purchasing remotely healthy meals would be way out of my budget"
 - "Everything super expensive nowadays and the healthiest options aren't available"
 - If financially constrained you have to cook for yourself if you want to eat healthy
 - Food on campus is extremely expensive (and not even healthy)
 - "Oftentimes I don't eat because I don't have time to buy food from daily table and I can't afford to keep buying \$15 meals from the stud"
 - "making any remotely healthy meal takes time that I very often dont have. I have packed lunches to avoid walking back to my dorm before but these are usually just peanut butter and jelly sandwiches"
- Cooking is worth the food quality and actually being able to afford it
- "Sometimes I get busy and don't have time to cook. I either buy food or wait until I head home."
 - Could be related to inaccessibility of fridges/stoves on campus
- May forget to pack lunch and eat bananas that day
- Distance is time constraining -> going across campus to get food

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- "classes at Sloan with only 30min/1hr in between, which usually isn't enough to go back to NV/Maseeh."
- Having access to friends with meal swipes is useful
- Disconnect between MIT grocery shuttles and when people are free to get groceries
 - "Trying to keep up with all my classes, attend them, and also go to office hours in order to do well just takes such a toll that by the time I'm remotely free its 7pm. Then I go to the grocery store, which takes 20 minutes to walk to [...] I can't go during shuttle times(which i often cant make because they end at like 3pm) [...]. without even considering time to shop or time to cook."
 - Possible recommendations
 - Ask M2 shuttles to take MIT students
 - Give free T passes or at least making the 1 bus free
 - Run MIT shuttles at better times
- Housing overflow to grad -> **grad housing isn't covered by financial aid** -> cutting meals bc can't afford rent
- Various mental health conditions make it harder to get the energy to eat
- "Meal plans are so expensive, and so are **groceries**."
- Some cook for yourself dorms (macg, new) are far
- Physical limit to amount of food you can carry when grocery shopping (2 responses)
 - "walk also limits the amount of food I can get per trip"
- No places on campus to prepare food
 - "I am quite busy and can only prepare food away from campus."
- Procrastination
 - "my meals aren't that balanced because i procrastinate and don't have time to grocery shop"
- Distance
 - "Affordable food options are a far away from MIT"

Care to explain more

- No

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- My classes always tend to be during lunch hours so I always skip lunch
- Lowkey neither
- Going grocery shopping and then cooking that meal is a lot of time. And it requires a continuous block of time. Most of the time I'm too busy to go shopping on weekdays so that means I also have to plan food out on a Saturday or Sunday for the entire week and that takes **effort**
- Between classes, it can be difficult to eat consistently
- The duality of it is the problem for me. I was **forced** to buy the meal plan even though I don't want to because of where I live (I **didn't want to live there** by the way but they would let me move to a cook-for-yourself), but the meal plan is so expensive I can't afford to pay for it as well as the extra meals that aren't covered by it. For me personally I could save a lot of money and afford all meals if I could cook-for-myself and wasn't forced to buy a meal plan.
- Don't have time to cook, too expensive to buy premade options
- The timing of classes, recitations, exams, and activities **all align very poorly** in relation to when I should be eating. I very rarely have sufficient time to get eat properly throughout the day.
- Dining halls close really early and usually if I'm working late and can't go to the dining hall I'm also too tired to cook afterwards
- When I wake up in the mornings, I don't have enough time to sit down to eat breakfast at a dining hall before I have to be at class and so I end up skipping breakfast because of it. Also on the **weekends**, it is easy to go the **entire day** only eating one meal at a dining hall if even because I was **busy** during the few times the dining halls were open.
- It feels hard to spend too much money on something that will disappear.
- It's an **extremely close difference** for me. I would have to be honest and say if I had more spare money to buy food with I wouldn't deprioritize it among my classes, homework, extracurricular commitments, etc. Because I often don't view it as worthy of a choice to

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commit to making food if I'm not *terribly* hungry and have work to do. And I always have work to do. I am on a meal plan (60) as a fail safe for when this **deprioritization** or skipping meals goes on for long enough and I recognized I need to eat but still need to continue prioritizing my work and classes. **If I was able to have a better feeling about making food and not needing to ration anything out or keep in mind how long it'll last, I would definitely be able to cook more** (I probably wouldn't be on a meal plan in that case).

- Getting groceries is at least an hour long ordeal because the closest grocery stores are 20+ minutes away by walking and although I have a bike I cannot physically carry enough food to sustain me for a week while biking so I am forced to walk. Oftentimes I don't eat because I don't have time to buy food from daily table and I can't afford to keep buying \$15 meals from the stud
- It takes too much time to plan and eat 3 meals a day.
- sometimes i would rather sleep in more instead of eat breakfast, or i didn't prepare anything and don't want to wait in long lines
- Can't afford to buy meals all the time, so I cook for myself. That's extra time, but it's worth it considering the savings and the increase in food quality (dining hall food is very bad sometimes!). Sometimes I get busy and don't have time to cook. I either buy food or wait until I head home.
- It's both—if I'm eating at home, I'm fully food secure. However, if I forget to pack lunch, I can't really afford to eat on campus. Going back home takes time since I live off campus, so I often just resort to bananas (banana lounge) and S^3 bars.
- I don't have time to preprepare meals every week and then when I'm on campus, I can't afford any real meal during my hour for lunch so I just miss lunch fairly often.
- No time between classes, can't grab something quick and nutritious and affordable from stud anymore except at weird hours before 4 or 6

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- Sometimes I have **back-to-back plans** through a meal slot where I could neither get dining hall food nor cook my own. I usually solve this problem by buying **packaged food** or living on **BL bananas**.
- I can make myself a can of soup really quickly but I often don't set aside time to go grocery shopping until I have literally nothing left to eat
- I always have to go all the way across campus for meals and often don't have enough time
- Both but with no meal plan, I have to cook all the time. Really difficult to factor in grocery shopping (travel too) and cooking time.
- It's hard to find time to go to the dining hall, and **I wish my meal plan taps were accepted at Stata or other on-campus eateries**. I don't want to spend money elsewhere, so sometimes I end up just not eating.
- Grocery shopping j takes a lot of time and effort and then when i buy fresh ingredients its a little hard to use it up since some days i dont have time and will j have my **friends w meal swipes** tap me in
- Trying to keep up with all my classes, attend them, and also go to office hours in order to do well just takes such a toll that by the time I'm remotely free its 7pm. Then I go to the grocery store, which takes 20 minutes to walk to if I don't want to pay for an uber or if I can't go during **shuttle times**(which i often cant make because they end at like 3pm), so it takes 20 minutes to walk back and forth alone TO THE STORE. without even considering time to shop or time to cook.
- I could eat more balanced meals at dining hall if I could afford the meal plan
- Everything super expensive nowadays and the healthiest options aren't available
- It is difficult to find time for lunch when I only have half an hour some days
- I spend around 8h/ week cooking for myself because purchasing remotely healthy meals would be way out of my budget

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- Currently in between jobs and have been relying on others for dinner or swipes sometimes
- MIT keeps getting more expensive and aid doesn't really increase proportionally with it, so I am left cutting meals in order to still be able to barely pay rent and go to school here (I got shoved into Grad Housing because I used to live in EC and there's not enough UG housing and the grad rates are not subsidized to UG rates, nor is the UG aid reflective of living in grad housing).
- Classes keep me locked into campus from the moment I wake up until after stores close. I cannot go to grocery stores during the week because I'm occupied with work and can't make the trip.
- The pace of MIT is just so fast and stressful that I don't feel like I have any time to breathe much less sit down in eat. I also have an eating disorder that is exacerbated by stress, so that makes it take even more energy to eat, and it doesn't feel worth the energy I spend on it a lot of times.
- Meal plans are so expensive, and so are groceries.
- Making and prepping meals takes a lot of time and energy. It's hard to find a way to fit it into my schedule especially when I'm on campus all day and I live so far (New House).
- I am financially independent and budget for inexpensive and nutritious home-cooked meals (generally less than **\$5 per meal in ingredient costs and easy to meal prep**). However, I often don't have time to meal prep and even when I do, I also often don't have time to sit down and eat the meal + associated tasks like packing into Tupperware, lugging around in backpack, finding a space to warm up, and washing everything. So even when I have food cooked, I don't always have time to eat it. And financial constraints prevent me from buying a more expensive meal that could be more time-efficient (like eating out or a meal plan/meal kit/meal delivery service).
- Honestly both, but the biggest is time to buy groceries factored into cooking the meal
- I have a very tight schedule and I am on a sports team so I have limited amount of time to get food, especially on weekends

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- My biggest contributor to food problems is a combination of not having access to food nearby and not having enough money to order food to be delivered.
- I have the money, but feel like it isn't worth it in the long run to spend extra \$ on food (especially healthy options) (aka **I'd rather save and eat less healthy now**)
- **No food on the East side of campus.** I usually skip lunches because I have classes at Sloan with only 30min/1hr in between, which usually isn't enough to go back to **NV/Maseeh**.
- I'm a poor college student and it's easy for me to say oh I can skip this meal if it means I save more money
- making any remotely healthy meal takes time that I very often don't have. I have packed lunches to avoid walking back to my dorm before but these are usually just **peanut butter and jelly sandwiches**.
- Cooking for yourself requires time to not only cook, but go to the grocery store, have space in the fridge/pantry. With no grocery store on campus, the closest grocery store to me is 15 minutes walk. It being a walk also limits the amount of food I can get per trip. Overall, this makes cooking for yourself, while significantly cheaper than MIT dining plans, a **huge time sink**. Anyway **all of this to say that we need a grocery store on campus**, this would alleviate many problems and I was very disappointed in MIT that they just didn't get one after Las Verdes left.
- Small breaks between classes, paired with living across the river and infrequent time to meal prep, along with **how financially ridiculous even the smallest meal plan is**, meant it was often difficult to really dedicate a meaningful amount of time towards preparing food
- I am quite busy and can only prepare food away from campus.
- I get super anxious about having enough money for food
- I need to eat 3 meals a day but can't get the highest meal plan
- No convenient options on campus

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- Food is cheap, but sometimes my meals aren't that balanced because i **procrastinate** and don't have time to grocery shop
- I am **begging you to put cheap food in the stud**. It is common on every campus except ours. Dunkin is popular for a reason, just put more places like that. And good lord are we going to get a Verde's replacement or not. There have been 6 billion emails on Israel-Palestine (which is an issue no one here is going to fix), but actual physical wellness is a second rate concern.
- not enough time to go home and cook or often not enough time in the evenings to cook
- I live off campus so it's a big time sink to get groceries, cook, eat, and clean everything up. I also have to give myself small proportions so food lasts longer.
- Affordable food options are a far away from MIT, especially now that grocery options like verdes is gone
- Since there are so few food options on campus (especially for dinner) and no grocery store, it is extremely time consuming having to go off campus and take a bus or a shuttle to get to the grocery store. If I am trying to get a meal at night quickly in between meetings it is nearly impossible unless I walk to kendal or go all the way to central (which i often don't have time to do). The only option on campus for dinner is teado and due to my allergies I can't eat there for a meal.
- Dining hall is at least a 30 minute experience on the best of days and getting groceries also takes a while since there's nowhere nearby

Anything Else

- TechCASH is has limited utility
 - "the only places you can use it at are expensive and offer limited food options."
 - Need more places (both groceries and prepared food) to accept it
 - People are willing to get less cash as long as it's not techcash

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- "I'm willing to take cash at slightly lesser value for the ability to choose to purchase groceries at cheaper or more convenient grocery stores"
 - "Tech cash constrains me to overpriced unhealthy food. I"
 - "The problem with TechCash is there's really nowhere to spend it. H-Mart is expensive, Brothers is expensive, there's Daily Table, but that's limited options. We were told a vendor to replace Verde's would open this spring and there clearly is not one. The new vending hub is also *expensive*."
 - Target is a preferred vendor
- Forced meal plans are not a good solution
 - "If you really care about food security, stop shoving excessive & expensive meal plans onto students."
- Some students want less swipes but more techcash
- TechCASH is good over cash
 - More helpful because encourages using available campus options
 - "I am very against spending my own money on food especially since I am on a meal plan"
- Grab and go and frozen food available in dorm
 - "having grab and go or even freezer meals available in my dorm would probably be the most helpful thing for me because I have food allergies and the only dining hall with an allergy friendly station is maseeh which is really far from my dorm"
- Existing options are enough to feed you if you used them
 - "I'm generally pretty well fed and i don't feel food insecure. Even though i don't have a meal plan, lots of my friends have them and **they tap me in a lot**. There are also so many pre-existing free food options on campus (free food farm stand, community dinner, free food mailing list, other club dinners, etc.). I've never heard of anyone going hungry because of lack of money."
- "If any of this leads to some kind of meal plan being required for all students, that will hurt a lot of people."
- "Forbes Cafe \$8 meals have been a lifesaver, but other than that oftentimes the places that accept TechCASH are quite pricey and it would be cheaper to go elsewhere"

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- “The time it takes to get food on campus when not on a meal plan is the main barrier to me eating. Fast options like delivery are expensive. I wish retail dining options had extended hours so I could eat dinner there”

Form responses

- I would love to get free money 😊
- TechCASH is useless when the only places you can use it at are expensive and offer limited food options.
- If you really care about food security, stop shoving excessive & expensive meal plans onto students. Let them redirect more of that food money freely.
- Well the thing is I don't eat when I can't go to the dining hall because they don't mesh well with my schedule. When this happens I need to get enough money weekly to meal prep something that would last a week for when that happens and that's not happening most of the time for under 30-40 dollars
- I would like to clarify that the reason I mostly chose the techcash option was because that would enable me to eat breakfast as I could stop for a few minutes and grab a muffin from the cafe in lobby 7 as opposed to wasting a time and a meal swipe at a dining hall. This would also enable me to be on a smaller meal plan as the weekly tech cash could cover breakfast meals.
- I would choose techcash options if there were more places that took techcash. Currently the options we have to spend techcash is bare.
- 3-4 mealplan swipes are worht \$60 in cash. That's so expensive.
- I would use the TechCash to buy groceries at H-mart. **I'm willing to take cash at slightly lesser value for the ability to choose to purchase groceries at cheaper or more convenient grocery stores**. Dorm options are N/A since I live off-campus to save money.
- Even if someone lives off campus and can afford groceries, having easy accessible food options on campus is helpful for those who cannot afford to access dorm meal plans.

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- I don't live in a dorm so I don't know if having food available in dorms would be at all helpful for me.
- **I think receiving tech-cash (or even meal swipes) would be more helpful than regular cash because it would encourage me to make use of the dinning hall more which i currently don't do because of how expensive it is. That being said, having grab and go or even freezer meals available in my dorm would probably be the most helpful thing for me because I have food allergies and the only dining hall with an allergy friendly station is maseeh which is really far from my dorm.**
- for techcash to actually be a useful way to combat food insecurity there needs to be a convinient store that accepts tech cash.
- Please try to get more locations that accept TECHcash as it would make it so much more accessible to get food with it!
- Tech cash is limited to certain vendors, oftentimes which are more expensive (i.e. brother's marketplace) so the same amount of money doesn't buy as much as non-tech-cash places. that's why normal cash instead of tech cash is preferable
- Tech cash constrains me to overpriced unhealthy food. I
- The problem with TechCash is there's really nowhere to spend it. H-Mart is expensive, Brothers is expensive, there's Daily Table, but that's limited options. We were told a vendor to replace Verde's would open this spring and there clearly is not one. The new vending hub is also *expensive*.
- I chose TechCash over cash because **I am very against spending my own money on food especially since I am on a meal plan**. Even with being on a meal plan, sometimes I don't have time to eat at a dorm so TechCash would be helpful to eat at a cafe or Stata on campus in between 30 minute class breaks or during days where I go into lab.
- I think TechCASH would need to be offered at more places for it to truly be as practical as in the examples

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- It is hard to pick a tipping point between tech cash vs actual cash. Actual cash could be used at target which gets a lot more in groceries than brothers or hmart, but at a certain point the tech cash is more appealing.
- I have basically unlimited food at my ILG so more food in my dorm would not matter. The issue is going back and forth from campus to my dorm, which I don't have time for, which means I often skip meals. I buy food on campus about once every 2 weeks because of this
- The meal plans are extremely expensive for what they offer. If they were 25 to 40 percent cheaper it would make sense to buy one to help with days I don't have other meals.
- TechCASH is pretty limited for food options and the places we can use it are all expensive except the daily table which is far so cash is much better.
- I'm generally pretty well fed and i don't feel food insecure. Even though i don't have a meal plan, lots of my friends have them and they tap me in a lot. There are also so many pre-existing free food options on campus (free food farm stand, community dinner, free food mailing list, other club dinners, etc.). I've never heard of anyone going hungry because of lack of money.
- If any of this leads to some kind of meal plan being required for all students, that will hurt a lot of people.
- TechCASH isn't really helpful unless campus food prices are low--the Forbes Cafe \$8 meals have been a lifesaver, but other than that oftentimes the places that accept TechCASH are quite pricey and it would be cheaper to go elsewhere
- The time it takes to get food on campus when not on a meal plan is the main barrier to me eating. Fast options like delivery are expensive. I wish retail dining options had extended hours so I could eat dinner there
- Why do on campus prices change so much:(

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Additional Commentary

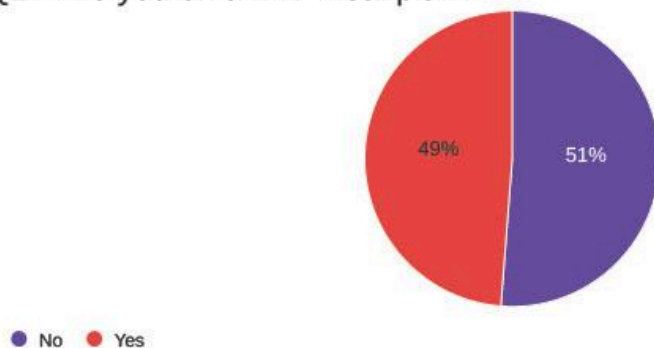
Students who are mandated to have swipes may not have any more money for food because they are spending it all on the meal plan, and given that there are no ways to use swipes on the East side of campus, it is imperative that swipes be useable on such vendors, especially considering that students may not have time to walk from class to Maseeh or New Vassar and back to class in order to get lunch. On the other side, on-campus food vendors tend to be available only up to lunchtime, and there are currently no places on campus in which to buy prepared meals for people without swipes, so it would be worth piloting extended hours for at least a vendor in Stata and/or the Student Center.

Finally, part of time-based food insecurity may come from a lack of time to eat due to back-to-back classes, activities and schoolwork. There are multiple avenues to help with this, to be pursued simultaneously. First, it is worth exploring if the UA can talk to the Registrar and the student body to explore if it is feasible to have a campus-wide lunch hour in which classes cannot be scheduled unless they provide lunch. Second, since groceries are a long walk away, the UA should talk with Transportation and Parking to provide extended grocery shuttle hours, and either an additional shuttle from lobby 7 to Daily Table or subsidizing MBTA T passes to use the 1 bus. Last, the UA Food Security Committee should collaborate with offices and other student organizations to create an educational resource for cook-for-yourself individuals on how to feed oneself in a way that is cheap, time-efficient and nutritious.

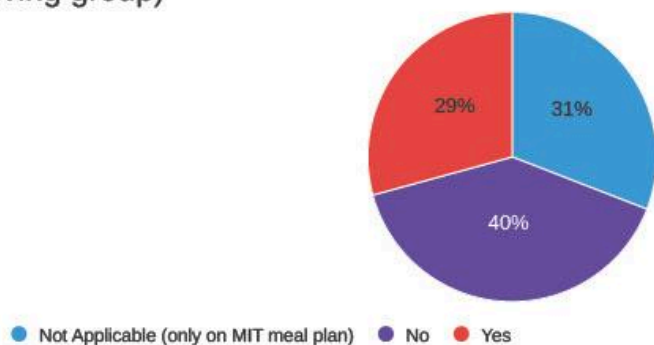
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Unfiltered Data

Q2 - Are you on a MIT meal plan?



Q3 - Are you on any other type of meal plan aside from the one offered through MIT? (such as one offered by your Frat, Sorority, or independent living group)

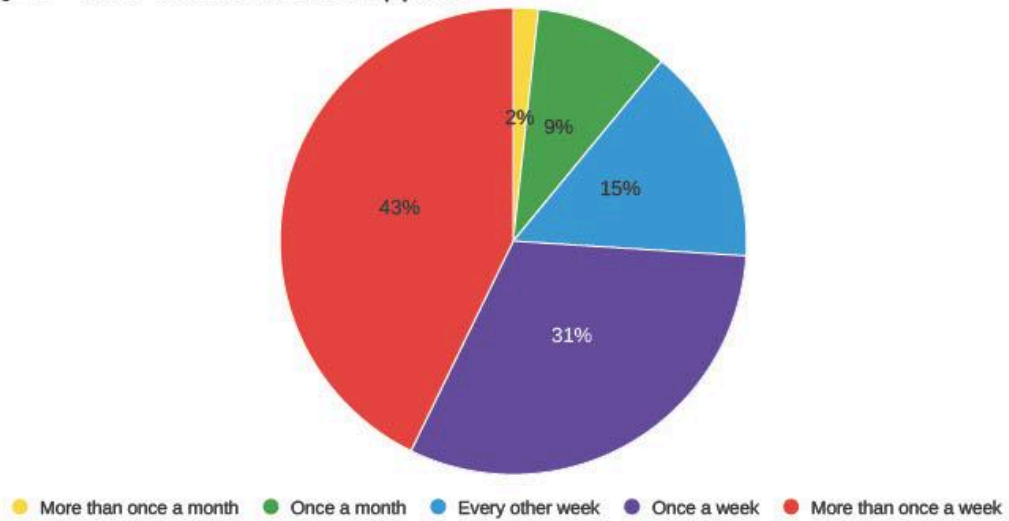


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Q9 - In the last semester, did you ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?

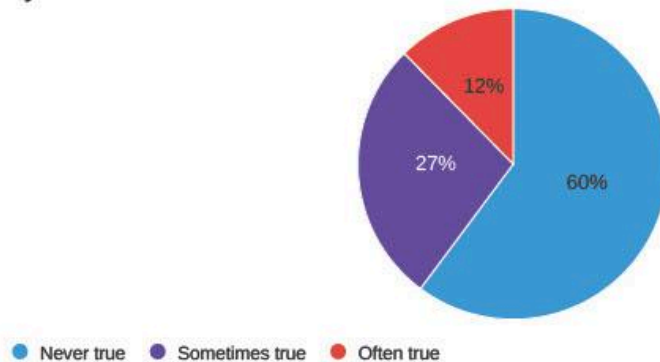


Q10 - How often did this happen?

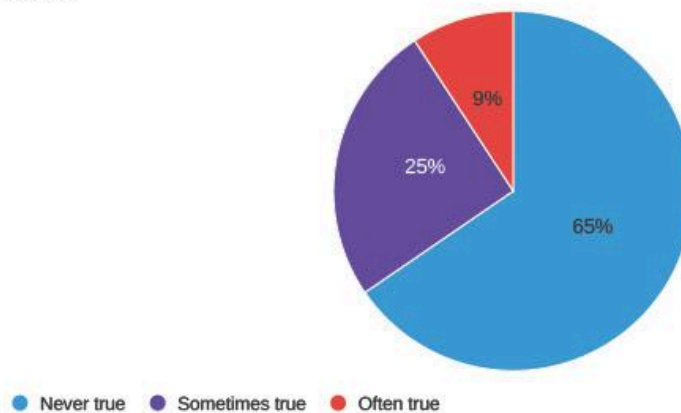


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Q11 - "I worried whether my food would run out before I got money to buy more."

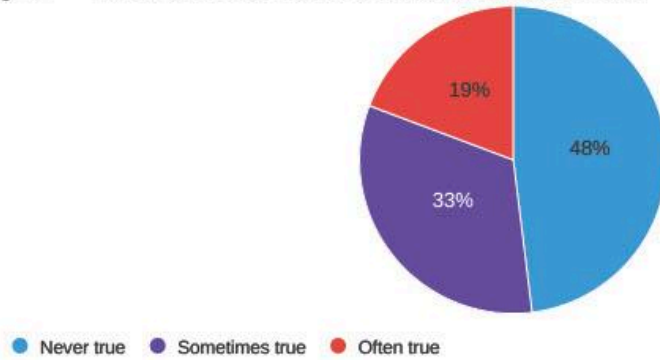


Q12 - "The food I bought just didn't last, and I didn't have money to get more."

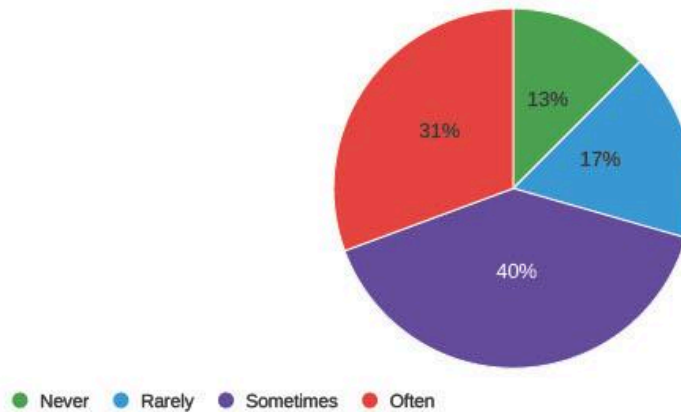


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Q13 - "I couldn't afford to eat balanced meals."

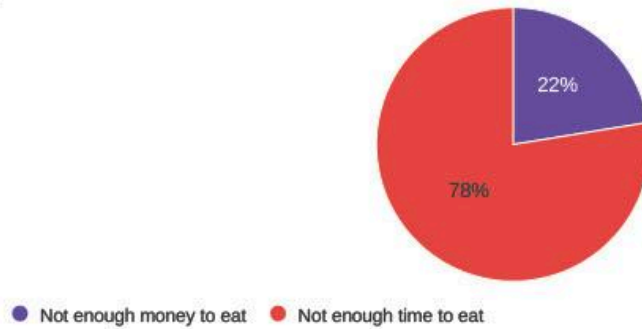


Q14 - If you cook for yourself, how often do you skip meals because you don't have time to cook but would have had time to eat at a dining hall?

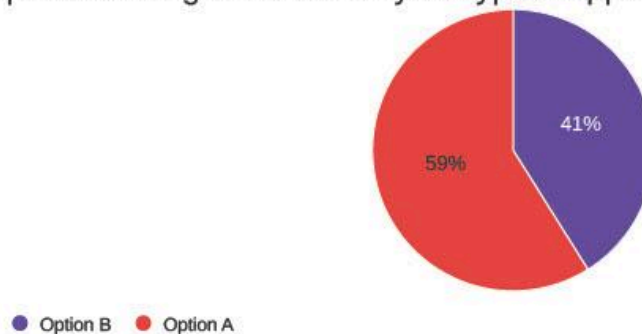


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Q22 - What would you say is the biggest contributor to your food problems

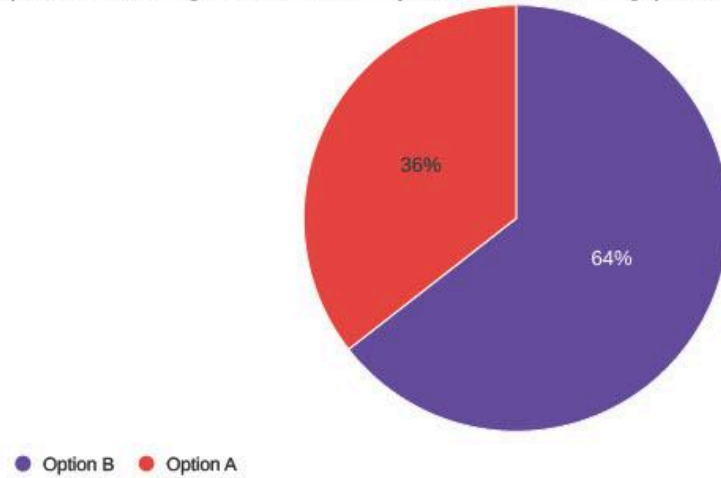


Q24 - If you cook for yourself, consider your typical approach to acquiring meals: Option A: Spend more time cooking and preparing meals to save money. Option B: Spend less time cooking but allocate more money for convenient, ready-made meals. Please choose the option that aligns more with your typical approach:



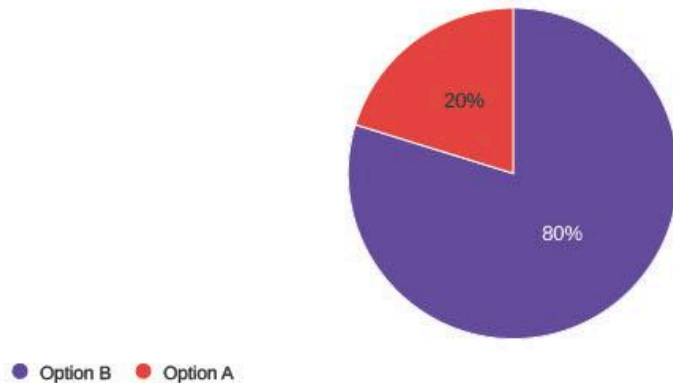
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Q25 - Consider your typical approach for on-campus dining: Option A: Utilize on-campus dining facilities, even if it's pricier. Option B: Explore off-campus alternatives for more affordable dining. Please choose the option that aligns more with your usual dining preference:

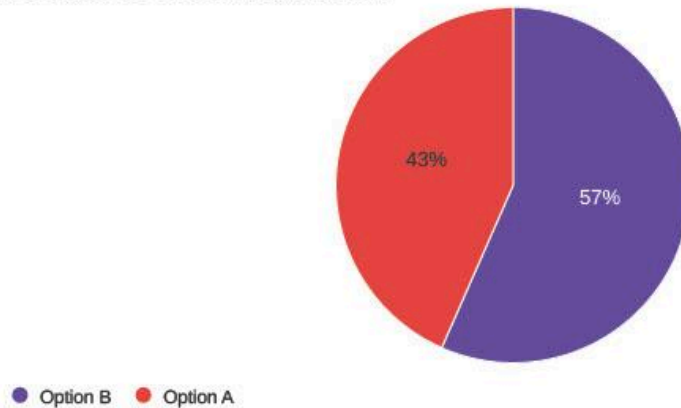


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Q26 - Consider the following options: Option A: Receive an additional \$15 in TechCASH a week for food-related expenses (resets each week). Option B: Receive an additional \$15 in cash a week for food-related expenses (resets each week). Please select the option that you would be more inclined to choose:

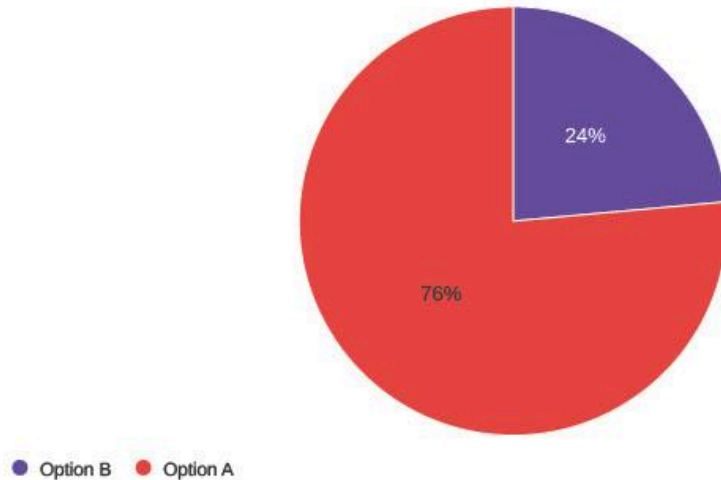


Q28 - Consider the following options: Option A: Receive an additional \$15 in TechCASH a week for food-related expenses (resets each week). Option B: Receive an additional \$13 in cash a week for food-related expenses (resets each week). Please select the option that you would be more inclined to choose:



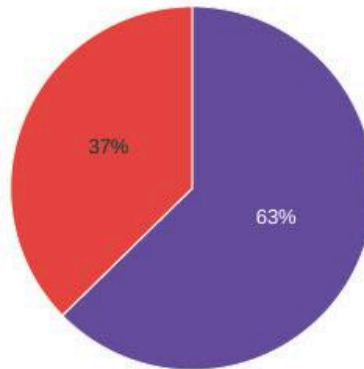
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Q30 - Consider the following options: Option A: Receive an additional \$15 in TechCASH a week for food-related expenses (resets each week). Option B: Receive an additional \$10 in cash a week for food-related expenses (resets each week). Please select the option that you would be more inclined to choose:



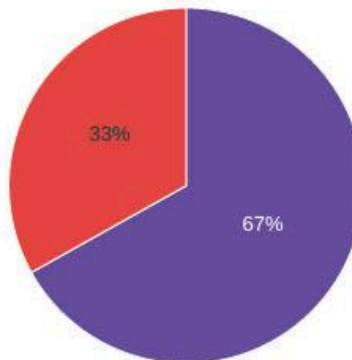
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Q32 - Consider the following options: Option A: Have to option to purchase frozen food (e.g. microwave) in your dorm at a 50% discount. Option B: Receive an additional \$15 in TechCASH a week for food-related expenses (resets each week). Please select the option that you would be more inclined to choose:



● Option B ● Option A

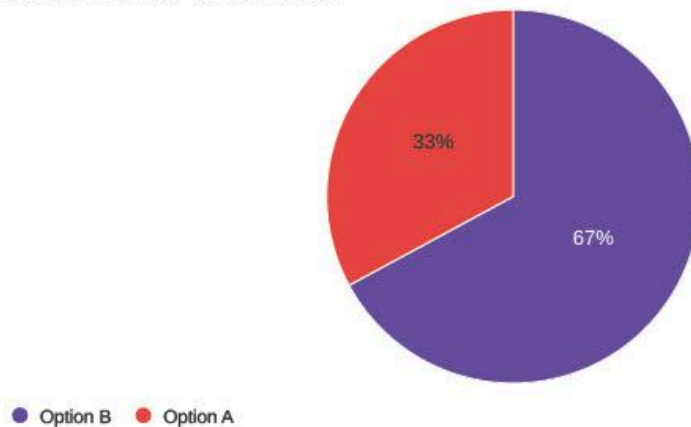
Q34 - Consider the following options: Option A: Have to option to purchase fresh food (i.e. prepared grab-and-go meals) in your dorm at a 50% discount. Option B: Receive an additional \$40 in TechCASH a week for food-related expenses (resets each week). Please select the option that you would be more inclined to choose:



● Option B ● Option A

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Q36 - Now, think about your financial situation and its impact on your food choices: Option A: Receive the equivalent of \$60 weekly in TechCASH for food on top of my existing financial aid without affecting my financial aid. Option B: Receive the equivalent of \$50 weekly in additional cash for food on top of my existing financial aid without affecting my financial aid. Please choose the option that you would be more inclined to choose:



Reach out to ua-exec@mit.edu and dormcon-exec@mit.edu for data inquiries.