

Community Cooking Workshops

A mechanism to promote healthy cultural adjustment at Simon Fraser University



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Introduction

Community Cooking Workshops are an initiative offered by Simon Fraser University (SFU) to international undergraduate and graduate students. It is a project of SFU's Healthy Campus Community endeavour to cultivate an environment and culture that contributes to wellness. Such goals and ways of reaching them have much in common with Healthy Minds | Healthy Campuses' Changing the Culture of Substance Use (CCSU) project. CCSU has endorsed the cooking workshops and also provided the initiative with temporary funding assistance to help it become a sustained component of health promotion at SFU.

The CCSU project was initiated to develop capacity in BC's campuses and a provincial support infrastructure towards encouraging healthier relationships with substances in post-secondary

settings. It was founded on a socio-ecological model of health promotion that attends to social cultures and environmental conditions and their influence on individual behaviours. Through consultation, collaboration, knowledge mobilization and co-creation of evidence-informed resources, the project was designed to facilitate collective action positively affecting factors that bear on how beneficial or not substance use is within campus communities.

This resource relates SFU's experience in providing community cooking workshops and offers suggestions on why and how other post-secondary institutions might host similar workshops in their settings and expect comparable outcomes from such efforts. Appendices include references and tools. It is SFU's hope that this aid will serve to inspire and equip others in ventures of this sort, and in having fun in the process!



Overview

What are these events and why hold them?

The Community Cooking Workshops are learning sessions that enable SFU international students to gain valuable cooking and nutrition skills in a safe and supportive setting. As such, they present a low-barrier opportunity for meaningful social interaction and relationship building among these students. Offered by SFU Health Peers, the workshop series began in September 2013, in consultation with SFU International Services for Students, when a need for basic nutritional education and food preparation skill development for international students at SFU was identified. The hands-on cooking workshops are held in an on-campus kitchen space with no cost to students, who participate voluntarily. They also provide occasion for conversation around various topics especially pertinent to wellness in a post-secondary context.

The Community Cooking Workshop series is one of many projects within SFU's Healthy Campus Community initiative, which aims to create an institutional culture and environment that supports well-being. The workshops specifically relate to goals within SFU's vision for a Healthy Campus Community (see entry in Appendices):

- SFU will enhance conditions for meaningful social connection and sense of belonging
- SFU will increase opportunities to enhance staff, faculty and students' well-being, resilience, personal growth and individual capacity for health

The goals of the Community Cooking Workshops include:

1. Creating opportunities for meaningful social connection
2. Teaching basic food preparation and nutrition skills as per Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide
3. Facilitating brief discussions related to health topics including alcohol use, sexual health, stress and resilience, and nutrition.

One of the goals of the SFU Health Peers is to intentionally support the well-being of vulnerable student populations. In a 2017 Simon Fraser University report on its international students, 19.4% of the total undergraduate population were identified as coming from outside of Canada and 28.3% of the total graduate population as likewise from other countries.¹ Along with adjusting to university life, international students may be required to learn a new language, learn how to prepare meals for themselves, and manage their own finances.² These added pressures could result in an increased prevalence of anxiety, stress, sleep disorders, and depression.² Given that international students are at high risk to become socially isolated, it is important to support initiatives that help them feel supported and connected to the university community.

While these cooking workshops were originally focused on educating international students on how to make healthier nutrition choices and teaching them important cooking skills, the workshops

1. Institutional Research and Planning. (2017). Simon Fraser University Engaging the World. Retrieved from https://www.sfu.ca/irp/news/international_student_report.html

2. Almohanna, A., Conforti, F., Eigel, W., & Barbeau, W. (2015). Impact of Dietary Acculturation on the Food Habits, Weight, Blood Pressure, and Fasting Blood Glucose Levels of International College Students. *Journal of American College Health*, 63(5), 307-314.

have grown to encompass supporting international students' social and emotional well-being. By using food as a medium to encourage conversation and build social connectedness, the cooking workshops are meeting both the mental health and nutrition education needs of international students at SFU and helping to protect against mental health problems, such as depression, and high-risk behaviours, such as alcohol misuse.

Who runs them and how?

The workshops are supervised by the SFU Health Promotion team and coordinated by the SFU Health Peers (within Health and Counselling Services). Besides the campus services providing the kitchen space, others assist with publicizing the events.

The Health Peers work with SFU Health Promotion to ensure that meals are nutritious, easy to prepare, and health information provided is current. Peers who lead a Community Cooking Workshop have had specific training on nutrition, positive body image and food safety (developed by a Registered Dietitian). Student participants are given a recipe guide (see Appendices re this resource), which includes the evening's recipes (as well as others), health tips and contact information for relevant on- and off-campus resources. The Health Peers also lead a brief 10-minute health education presentation, either through an interactive game or group discussion activity, to inform students

about healthy behaviours (related to alcohol use, sexual health, stress and resilience, and nutrition) and mindful eating.

An on-campus grocery store, Nesters Market, sponsors the food for the workshops. The workshops are promoted through the International Services for Students' weekly newsletter and SFU Residence and Housing's TWIRL (This Week in Residence Life) newsletter.

A bit more about the SFU Health Peers

The SFU Health Peers are a paraprofessional student volunteer group, trained and supervised by the Health Promotion team in Health and Counselling Services. The Health Peers lead health education programming across all SFU campuses to enhance student health and well-being. Health Peers help students build knowledge and skills related to resilience, sleep hygiene, active living, sexual health, safe substance use and nutrition. Health Peer programming can take many forms, including workshops, presentations, committee representation, campaigns, as well as regular tabling.





Workshop Outcomes

While debrief sessions shortly after such workshops can provide pertinent observations and impressions from among those hosting the events, qualitative feedback from the invited student participants themselves is critical for obtaining a strong sense of impact. The following indicators were taken from 124 feedback forms collected from the 10 community cooking workshops offered in 2016–2017.

Highlights

- 85% of students report making a new friend as a result of attending the workshop.
- 84% of students reported they were confident they could incorporate ideas/tips/strategies from the workshop into their lives.
- 70% of students reported their knowledge/understanding of healthy eating improved as a result of the workshop.

What interviewed students are saying

“The most important things that I learned that people are different, and you never know when you’ve found a person ... who has ... interests that interest you.”

“We talked with each other when eating so the atmosphere is so good and I like that.”

“I’m learning how to prepare those foods, I didn’t know how to prepare those food before, like peppers how you cut peppers in that way.”

“When I cook I remember the workshop and I try to organize everything in a way it was organized during the workshop ... have separate bowls for different ingredients.”

“I just thought it was informative ... I thought there was a lot to take about from it and I just love getting new recipes ... [it] pushes me out of my comfort zone instead of just going to my go to.”

[How has the workshop influenced your definition of healthy eating?] “I would say it enforced... my definition of healthy eating ... you know reading from website or reading from articles is so different from you go to a workshop and you hear in the presence you gain the tips or power from the instructor ... so that’s what makes cooking workshop really ... meaningful for me personally.”

Key takeaways

- Building cross-departmental relationships, taking a collaborative approach and fostering partnerships is integral to success
- Food is a powerful tool in transcending cultural and social barriers (i.e., encourages social connection and helps to encourage willingness to share during conversations about sensitive health topics)

The workshops have also been open to domestic students in residence. Though a minority among participants, their presence has enhanced connectedness for all.

The Planning Process

Some advance preparation is needed to make events like these happen smoothly and be enjoyable and worthwhile for participants. A planning checklist for a successful community cooking workshop might look like the following one.

2 weeks before the semester begins

- Decide on dates for the cooking workshops and how many students can participate
- Book the kitchen space for the desired dates
- Reach out to and meet with potential sponsors for the workshops, as well as departments that may be interested in collaborating
- Begin planning—including who is involved and what is needed in terms of supplies, marketing and recruiting participants, coordination, facilitation and evaluation (see Appendices for some resources)

2 weeks before workshop

- Decide on the menu (we use the Dietitians of Canada Cookbooks/websites and have our

recipes reviewed by a Registered Dietitian on the SFU Health Promotion Team; we design a menu with a main dish, dessert, and a snack. Think quick recipes with minimal ingredients that students can make in one hour or less.)

- Set up a registration system for student sign-up ahead of time (name, e-mail, dietary restrictions)

1.5 weeks before workshop

- Begin targeted (international students and student residents) and general event promotion through email, posters, websites and social media
- Create recipe guide and prepare for a health education presentation or facilitated discussion
- Purchase necessary cooking supplies (i.e., pots, pans, cups, napkins, knives, plates)

1-2 days before workshop

- Send a reminder e-mail to student registrants
- Arrange for grocery pick up and food storage
- Prepare a sign-in sheet with students' names and a blank sheet for drop-in students (name and e-mail)



Workshop Delivery

There are a lot of details to attend to in order to take care of invitees at the workshop. Assigning duties to team members in advance of the workshop can help organizers prepare for the event so they are in a better position to model attentiveness to people rather than being preoccupied with things and process. There is no one recipe for interacting and engaging with participants, but being friendly, respectful and asking questions that elicit thoughtful response are important ingredients. Some of the jobs to be completed may be as follows:

1-1.5 hours prior to student arrival

- Bring supplies to kitchen space
- Wash all produce and cooking supplies
- Arrange the cooking space (i.e., remove chairs, rearrange tables) and preheat ovens, if needed
- Lay out all cooking supplies (i.e., cutting boards, measuring cups) and necessary ingredients
- Set up a sign-in station where students can pick up the recipe guides, sign in, and make a name tag
- Have a team meeting (assign team members to certain stations and go over the flow of the evening)

During the workshop

1. Have students sign in and give them a recipe guide
2. Begin the workshop by welcoming participants and asking them to give a brief introduction (i.e., name, major, why they were interested in attending)
3. Nutrition presentation
4. Brief overview of the night
5. Explain initial food safe practices, such as hand washing and how to avoid cross-contamination
6. Get cooking! (Before beginning each cooking station go over some healthy eating tips as they pertain to the recipe, identify and describe the cooking utensils being used, demonstrate

how food items should be cut, and educate students about food safe practices, such as the temperature that meat should be cooked at/how to know if food is cooked)

7. While waiting for food to cook, help participants engage in a discussion, for example, on substance use (see Appendices for a resource)
8. Eat together! (That topical conversation can continue; eating is conducive to collective listening)
9. Thank you wrap-up! Hand out evaluation/feedback forms and invite students to stay in the space and mingle
10. Get team to clean up space

Post workshop

- E-mail students the recipe guide
- Thank sponsors and collaborators through social media and e-mails
- Use evaluation forms and feedback from participants and leaders to complete the post-workshop evaluation (see Appendices for a resource)

Concluding Thoughts

Post-secondary students are only as healthy (in a robust sense of wellness) as the quality of relationships they enjoy with fellow residents, classmates and other campus personnel. Students who can eat in a nutritious manner and relate in a reassuring way with others are more likely to enjoy greater overall well-being (including, e.g., healthier relationships with substances). So too, the campus community is only as healthy collectively as the degree of connectedness and mutual engagement it achieves among its members. Community cooking workshops for international students is one initiative that offers international students the opportunity to acquire important skills and cultivate meaningful friendships. Other initiatives are also needed to further support adjustment to a new setting and provide more extended social integration into a larger multicultural campus environment.

Appendices—Resources

1. Healthy Campus Community Vision
2. Recipe Guide Summary
3. What is Healthy Eating?
4. Healthy Eating and Healthy Living Tips
5. Food Preparation Tips
6. Substance Use Conversation Aid
7. Workshop Planning Form
8. Workshop Evaluation Form



Healthy Campus Community Vision

SFU's Vision for a Healthy Campus Community can be accessed at www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity/abouthcc/vision.html

Recipe Guide Summary

A recipe guide booklet has been a core component of SFU's Community Cooking Workshops. This handout has typically included the recipe (ingredients and directions) to be used at the session and perhaps some others. These recipes have often been accompanied by:

- Some guidance pieces around healthy eating (like the description and tips in the appendices that follow this one);
- Some introduction to a variety of food-related resources;
- References to other helps around healthy living, especially those which are campus-based; and, perhaps in particular,
- Supports connected to the health topic to be taken up at the workshop.

A sample recipe guide is accessible at <http://bit.ly/SFURecipeGuide>.

What is Healthy Eating?

"Healthy eating is going to the table hungry and eating until you are satisfied. It is being able to choose food you like and eat it and truly get enough of it—not just stop eating because you think you should. Healthy eating is being able to give some thought to your food selection so you get nutritious food, but not being so wary and restrictive that you miss out on enjoyable food. Healthy eating is giving yourself permission to eat sometimes because you are happy, sad or bored, or just because it feels good. Healthy eating is mostly three meals a day, or four or five, or it can be choosing to munch along the way. Healthy eating is trusting your body. It is leaving some cookies on the plate because you know you can have some again tomorrow, or it is eating more now because they taste so wonderful. Healthy eating takes up some of your time and attention, but keeps its place as only one important area of your life. In short, healthy eating is flexible. It varies in response to your hunger, your schedule, your proximity to food and your feelings." (Ellyn Satter Institute, 2016)



Healthy Eating and Healthy Living Tips

- a.** Have breakfast every day. It can help control your hunger later in the day.
- b.** Eat mindfully. Avoid distractions, such as watching TV, when you are eating so you can focus on your food.
- c.** Take time to eat and enjoy every bite!
- d.** Eat every three to four hours to stay energized throughout the day.
- e.** Walk wherever you can—get off the bus early, use the stairs. Try to be active for at least 2.5 hours per week.
- f.** Try to incorporate two servings of fish per week.³
- g.** Try to go meatless for one day a week.

Reducing red meat and processed meat consumption and increasing the consumption of fruits and vegetables can decrease the risk of chronic diseases, such as diabetes, obesity, and heart disease.

Reducing meat also has positive effects on the environment. Meat production produces more fossil fuels and greenhouse gases than plant-based protein.



- h.** Share meals with family and friends. Get everyone involved in making a meal together.
- i.** Eat in moderation. Follow the 80/20 rule; eat a balanced, healthy diet 80% of the time and allow yourself a treat and enjoy it 20% of the time.

Food Preparation Tips

- a.** Meal planning can save time and money. Plan your meals and do your shopping ahead of time.
- b.** Stock up on whole foods, such as vegetables, fruit, whole grain bread, whole grain pasta and brown rice, milk, yogurt, cheese, lean meats, fish, poultry, eggs, beans, lentils, nuts and seeds.
- c.** Use frozen or canned products to help speed up preparation time. For example, canned or bottled tomato-based pasta sauces, frozen or canned vegetables, frozen or canned fruit, bagged salad greens, canned tuna or salmon, canned beans or lentils.
- d.** Prepare foods in advance. Cook double the rice and freeze the leftover for another meal.⁴ Cook twice the chicken or ground beef you need and keep extra for salads, sauces or meals the next day.
- e.** Cook up a big batch of soups, stews, casseroles and pasta dishes to keep in the freezer.

3. Recommended by Canada's Food Guide as one source of omega-3 fats.

4. See <https://www.eatrightontario.ca/en/Articles/Budget/All-about-brown-rice.aspx> for tips on long-term storage of rice.

Substance Use Conversation Aid

Set-up:

- While waiting for food to cook, work as a group to make snacks/smoothies for students to enjoy while participating in the discussion.
- Depending on the size of the group, arrange participants in a circle with everyone (including facilitators) seated comfortably at the same level.
- Prepare for around 15 minutes of unstructured discussion by creating ground rules for a safe conversation space.
- If needed, assign a leader as an informal note taker.

Brief introduction example

We want to thank everyone for coming out tonight. While we are waiting for the food to cook, we would like to have a discussion about your experience as an international student at SFU. This is an informal discussion. Although we encourage you to share your thoughts and ideas, if you feel uncomfortable you may also choose just to listen. If you have any other ideas or comments during dinner or after the workshop, please approach any one of us in person or contact us through e-mail. Thank you!

Sample questions

- What has been the most difficult part about coming to university in Canada?
- What have you enjoyed about your experience at university?
- What makes it difficult to “eat healthy” (eat nutritious and enjoyable food that helps you to function well)?
- What differences do you see between the food (access/cost/taste) back home and here?
- What differences do you see between why and how people drink (or don’t drink) alcohol back home and here in Canada at university? Why do you think those differences exist?
- What benefits/advantages/opportunities and what challenges/concerns/difficulties arise for you and your friends around use (or non-use) of alcohol at university?
- How would you like to see the campus community support students around questions and issues related to use of alcohol and other substances?



Workshop Planning Form

Instructions: Use a planning form like this when you are in the initial planning stages. You can work through such a form as a group to help you to reflect, think through and plan out the necessary details in order to achieve success.

Name of event	
Team members who are involved	
Who will lead this event?	
Health topic to be addressed	
Key takeaway messages	
Goals and objectives (Cf. SMART)	
Confirmed date	
Finalized time, location	
Booked location	
Who is the target audience?	
Description of marketing plan	
What activities will be used?	
Listing of resources needed	
Outline of evaluation plan	
Note personal and professional development opportunities	

Workshop Evaluation Form

Name and date of Activity/Event:

Name of Lead(s):

Name of Team Members:

Aspect of Peer Participation	# of Peers Involved	# of Total Hours
Planning (group meetings, outreach preparation, etc.)		
Research		
Workshop Delivery		
Outreach Delivery		
Other:		
Total		

Description of event/activity	
Target audience	
# of participants	
Qualitative feedback (comments, quotes, notes, etc.)	
How effective were the marketing strategies used?	
Did the outcome align with intended goals and objectives?	
Did everything go as planned? If not, describe further and indicate how the team adapted to challenges.	
What worked well?	
What could be changed to be more effective next time?	
General comments	



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