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An Exploration of College Student Experiences Regarding Healthy Eating at a Midsized Midwestern University: A Qualitative Approach

E. Jordan Stayer

Eastern Illinois University

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An Exploration of College Student Experiences Regarding Healthy

Eating at a Midsized Midwest University: A Qualitative Approach

(TITLE)

BY

E. Jordan Stayer

THESIS

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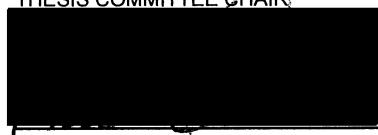
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Thesis

E. Jordan Stayer

Eastern Illinois University

May 2015

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ABSTRACT

This study was an exploration of the experiences college students have while eating in on-campus dining centers at a midsized, Midwest, public university. The present study examined college students' ($n = 7$) experiences of eating in the dining centers with a campus meal plan. Participants were asked a series of questions regarding their individual beliefs, their surrounding environment, and their physical behaviors while dining.

The study concluded that dining habits are very personal to each and every human being in the world. At the higher education level, because each student brings with them a completely different taste, desire, and value in terms of the food they choose to nourish their body with, administrators, faculty, and health educators must acknowledge how complex it is to provide healthy meal options to college students, and emphasize the need for on-going education and assessment.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

In spring of 2010, 6% of students ate five or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day, which was .6% below the targeted goal of *Healthy Campus 2020* (American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment II). The *Healthy People* initiative, “launched by the Department of Health and Human Services, began in 1979 as a systematic approach to health improvement, encompassing the mutually reinforcing tasks of setting goals, identifying baseline data and 10-year targets, monitoring outcomes, and evaluating the collective effects of health-improvement activities nationwide” (Koh, 2010, p. 1653). Koh continued:

Since the first iteration, the successive plans of *Healthy People 2000* (released in 1990) and *Healthy People 2010* (released in 2000) have identified emerging public health priorities and helped to align health-promotion resources, strategies, and research. Each decade, the program has set objectives that were deemed important, understandable, prevention-oriented, actionable, measurable with available high-quality data, and comparable to those in previous versions (p. 1653).

Further, “*Healthy Campus 2020* provides a framework for improving the overall health status on campuses nationwide” (American College Health Association, 2015, p. 1).

According to the American College Health Association:

Healthy Campus 2020 has evolved to: include national health objectives for students and faculty/staff; promote an action model using an ecological approach; and provide a toolkit for implementation based on the MAP-IT

(Mobilize, Assess, Plan, Implement and Track) framework. These tools and resources will help institutions of higher education determine which objectives are relevant, achievable, and a priority on their campus (p. 1).

In terms of educating and establishing nutrition campaigns throughout college campuses, the *Healthy People* and *Healthy Campus* guidelines are a good place to start.

In order to positively reflect the needs of our students, we must understand the factors that negatively impact the dietary development habits among youth. As student affairs professionals, we must assess and recognize student perceptions of food services throughout the country. Cousineau, Goldstein, & Franko suggest that one area for improving students' perceptions of dietary habits includes targeted resources for college students, and the importance of using students' suggestions in developing nutrition programs (Cousineau, Goldstein, & Franko, 2004). In fact, students at a northwestern Pennsylvania university are suggesting providing a more diverse menu, such as introducing more fruits and vegetables and salad combinations, in conjunction with serving grilled chicken as opposed to breaded or fried (Andaleeb & Caskey, 2007).

The ACHA-National College Health Assessment II (ACHA-NCHA II) is a national research survey organized by the American College Health Association (ACHA) to assist college health service providers, health educators, counselors, and administrators in collecting data about their students' habits, behaviors, and perceptions on the most prevalent health topics (ACHA, 2015). In the spring of 2014, The National College Health Assessment used an Undergraduates Reference Group consisting of 66,887 respondents (ACHA-NCHA). Among these college students, 58.6% ate 1-2 servings of fruits and vegetables per day, while only 29.3% ate 3-4 servings per day. The study also

found that 56.1% of undergraduate students did moderate-intensity cardio or aerobic exercise for at least 30 minutes 1-4 days per week, while 30.3% did vigorous-intensity cardio or aerobic exercise for at least 20 minutes 1-2 days per week; 51.3% of students met the recommendation for moderate-intensity exercise, vigorous-intensity exercise, or a combination of the two, according to the American College of Sports Medicine and the American Heart Association (Haskell et. al, 2007). When classified under Body Mass Index, 61.2% of these college students were at a healthy estimated average weight.

One might also consider the need for education of healthy food choices. Because of misleading advertisements, campaigns, or even publications regarding health, there is an increasing need for society to remain cognizant of the products we are putting into our bodies (Baranowski, Perry, and Parcel, 2002). Bowden (2009) eloquently said, “Whole, real, unprocessed food is almost always healthy, regardless of how many grams of carbs, protein or fat it contains” (p. 1). Education starts with the students of today.

Purpose of the Study

When it comes to choosing the right school for higher education, food service continues to develop as an important decision factor next to affordability, location, and academic resource availability (Horovitz, 2006). According to Horovitz, even when faced with the decision to choose between Harvard and Yale, student Philip Gant chose Yale not only for academics, but also for Yale’s dedication to serving “sustainable” (p. 1) food. Horovitz claimed that students such as Gant are “embracing the idea of food grown locally with ecologically sound and seasonally sensitive methods” (Horovitz, 2006, p. 1). According to scenarios such as the one Yale faced, higher education institutions are

slowly being tipped off that they must entertain the notion of offering good food choices in order to compete in today's collegiate environment.

The purpose of this study was to investigate college students' experiences regarding healthy eating in university dining centers. In order to do this, the study explored how students defined healthy meals, what kind of knowledge they had regarding nutrition, and whether or not they believed they received healthy options through a midsized, Midwest, public university's dining services. French and Stables (2003) reported that because fewer than one-third of U.S. adults and only about 20% of children and adolescents meet national recommendations for vegetables and fruits intake, there is a high need for understanding the motivations for healthy food choices and characteristics of vegetable and fruit promotion interventions.

Research Questions

These primary questions will seek to understand the nature of undergraduate students dining habits, and their experiences regarding healthy eating in university dining centers.

1. How do students perceive the importance of healthy eating habits on this campus?
2. What outside factors exist that contribute to or detract from healthy eating on this campus?
3. What is the extent to which the dining centers contribute to or detract from healthy eating on this campus?

Significance of the Study

The need for availability of healthy food options in dining centers varies among students' knowledge of healthy food options, as well as on the factors that influence food choices. This study seeks to further explain these questions in the context of the consumers of these services. This study shows significance in reflecting the needs of our students, as improvements in food quality and selection, staff services and their behavior, and pricing may have the greatest payoff in terms of student satisfaction (Andaleeb & Caskey, 2007).

Croll, Neumark-Sztainer, and Story (2001) concluded from a study done with adolescents that, "although students obtain knowledge about healthy versus unhealthy foods, obstacles such as lack of time, limited availability of healthy foods in schools, and simply a lack of concern for following healthy eating recommendations inhibit the action of eating a healthy diet, and consequently, cause students to eat food items deemed as unhealthy" (p. 193).

At the same time, additional research indicates that often times, individuals may not know the true content of their individual diets, possibly misunderstanding what is or is not healthy (Normand & Osborne, 2010). By observing purchases and providing dietary feedback, the study resulted in the increased awareness of individual food intake among participants, and ultimately, reduced calorie intake. Because there are differing terms of "what is healthy," and there are various channels through which students receive information regarding such terms, there is an ongoing need for making sure students receive the most valid information regarding nutrition, as well as making sure our administrators can provide the most appropriate quality of food to these students.

Personal Reflection

As an adolescent, I struggled with a bad case of acne, and I was quite overweight. I started using pharmaceutical drugs and lotions, and commercial products to combat my acne. And because I played sports, I didn't bother to second-guess the garbage I was throwing into my body for nutrition. None of this helped me feel neither confident nor comfortable in my own skin – so when I decided that enough was enough, I buckled down, and stayed disciplined to changing my ways. I discovered holistic practices and herbal supplements. The supplements I used, combined with a modified, cleaner diet, showed a great improvement in my overall health, and I have spent the latter half of my life educating myself on healthy eating habits, and natural practices which contribute to my overall health.

Definitions of Terms

Farm to Fork. Contains ingredients purchased from a local farm or artisan and that are seasonal and minimally processed (Bon Appétit Management Company, 2004).

Humane produce. No Cages, no crates, no tie stalls. Animals must be free to do what comes naturally. A diet of quality feed, without animal by-products, antibiotics, or growth hormones (Certified Humane, 2015).

Organic agriculture. Products using methods that preserve the environment and avoid most synthetic materials, such as pesticides and antibiotics (United States Department of Agriculture, 2015).

Nutrition. The process of providing or obtaining the food necessary for health and growth.

Perception. The way people think about or understand someone or something.

Social marketing. The adaptation of commercial marketing technologies to programs designed to influence the voluntary behavior of target audiences to improve their personal welfare and that of the society of which they are a part (Andreasen, 1994).

Vegetarian. Contains no meat, fish, poultry, shellfish, or products derived from these sources but may contain dairy or eggs (Bon Appétit Management Company, 2004).

Vegan. Contains absolutely no animal or dairy products (Bon Appétit Management Company, 2004).

Overview of Study

The present study was designed to investigate college students' experiences regarding healthy eating in university dining centers. The researcher did this by exploring the experiences of seven college students' eating habits in campus dining centers at a midsized, Midwest public institution.

By knowing the personal factors, the environmental factors, and the physical behaviors that influence college students' eating habits, university administrators will be better able to understand the dining needs of college students. By understanding these needs better, administrators will be better informed in making decisions that affect the holistic college experience of students dining on campus.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

Prior research proposes that normative stressors, such as course load and examination stress may influence students' dietary habits, and the Health and Behaviors Teenagers Study (HABITS) suggests that there is a relationship between stress and unhealthy dietary practices among adolescents (Cousineau, Goldstein, & Franko, 2004). Research also suggests that, "university and colleges students are an important target population for health promotion efforts, and that health is an important and neglected public health problem" (Kwan, Arbour-Nicitopoulos, Lowe, Tama, & Faulkner, 2010, p. 555). This is strong causation to study the way in which students in higher education nourish their bodies. The following literature review will examine the kind of education students receive about nutrition, the nutrition environment they are surrounded by, the food choices they make, and a theoretical concept which might explain these dining behaviors.

Nutritional Habits of College Students

According to a study among college students, Haberman and Luffey (1998) reported that students consumed higher than recommended quantities of total fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium, as well as eating inadequate amounts of fruits and vegetables and reporting poor exercise habits.

Additionally, Greaney et al. (2009) discussed how "entering college is a key transitional period for young adults" (p. 281). Greaney et al. (2009) suggested that college students face three transitional hurdles:

First, they face challenges adjusting to new surroundings and workloads, and many will have greater lifestyle freedom than ever before. Often these changes are associated with excessive weight gain. Second, there is reportedly low intake of fruits and vegetables, excess caloric intake, and lack of physical activity which are all frequently cited as reasons for weight problems in adults. Third, many college students have low intakes of fruits and vegetables and high intakes of food with excess calories, saturated fats, alcohol, and added sugars (p. 281).

Based on national surveys of college students, “only 5.7% report eating 5 or more daily servings of fruits and vegetables, 62% report only 1-2 daily servings of fruits and vegetables, and 21.8% report eating 3 or more high-fat food items a day” (p. 281).

In their study on the barriers and enablers of college students’ weight management, Greaney et al. (2009) found that more barriers than enablers were reported among students, indicating a stronger sensitivity to barriers than enablers for weight management. These researchers also found that some barriers include: temptation and lack of discipline, social situations, time constraints, ready access to unhealthful foods, and lack of access to healthful foods. This indicates a stronger need for easily accessible healthful foods, in order to combat the barriers to weight management.

Influence on Food Choices

Because habits that we form as children tend to stick with us as adults, it is important to understand the factors that influence our food choices at early ages in order to better guide prevention of morbidity and other issues associated with a poor diet (Boynton-Jarrett et al., 2003). Researchers have placed emphasis on using environmental change interventions rather than using school-based interventions, such as mass media, to

promote vegetable and fruit consumption among students in school settings (French & Stables, 2003). Boynton-Jarrett et al. concluded that content in commercial advertising broadcast during children's television programming promote food-consumption patterns that contradict the national dietary recommendations, and evidence shows that unhealthy dietary habits can be reinforced by those advertisements.

After conducting an intervention, and providing healthy choice indicators at point-of-selection to increase perceptions of availability of healthy food choices, Peterson et al. (2010) found that a short-term, multifaceted, benefit-based, point-of-selection intervention in a dining center setting can positively impact college students' eating behaviors. What must be considered is whether or not these indicators are in fact classified as healthy, and how one defines healthy.

Those who are classified as obese, or overweight, are found to be less confident in making healthful food choices, and were more influenced by food choices available in on-campus dining facilities (Peterson, Duncan, Null, Roth, & Gill, 2010). In order to reverse these cognitions, it is important to understand their background, and how providing healthful food options can increase the influence on making healthy food choices; that is part of what this study will try to examine.

In a study done by Glanz, Basil, Maibach, Goldberg, and Snyder (2002), the researchers found that, "factors such as taste, nutrition, cost, convenience and weight control in making food choices are highly influenced based on personal demographics" (p. 1124). For example, it was found that the older persons find nutrition and weight control more important in making decisions, while younger persons find cost and convenience more important. Gender influences taste, nutrition, cost, and weight control

(all of which were more important to women than men), and income when factored into cost and convenience is more important to those with lower incomes. Additionally, nonwhites (in terms of ethnicity) rate taste, nutrition, cost, convenience and weight control as more important (Glanz et al., 2002).

Based on a study done at a midsized, Midwest four-year institution, Dalton concluded that “eating habits amongst college students did change while at college due to laziness, lack of time, increased stress, studying late, and having no parent or guardian to prepare meals for them” (2013, p. iii). Dalton’s study implemented a point-of-selection intervention campaign, consisting of table tents, benefit-based posters, and food item indicator cards, all labeled with “the Right Stuff” slogan (Dalton, p. iii). Pre-intervention participants had positive perceptions including: the dining center offered a variety of food items, and that healthy food items were easily identified and possible to select, and post-intervention saw no change in this perception (Dalton, 2013).

Nutrition Environment

Freedman (2010) set out to develop two nutrition assessment tools for combating students who are overweight on college campuses. Some of the topics Freedman looked at included nutrition services, programs, and food environment. The study found assessment tools, such as the ones Freedman developed, are effective in clarifying existing nutrition programs, policies, and food offerings on campuses. Using such assessment tools environmental influences on eating behaviors can be identified and targeted for improvement (Freedman).

Freedman and Connors (2011) explained how “diet and eating behaviors are influenced by a complex set of interactions, ranging from individual choice to broader

social, cultural, economic, and environmental determinants” (p. 1222). Freedman and Connors (2001) claimed that:

Strategies for changing nutrition behavior focusing on the individual have high costs relative to their efficacy and reach, which has led to increasing interest in developing policies and environments that support healthful eating and obesity prevention in a given population rather than for individuals, and further explain that environmental approaches to healthful eating include improving access to and availability of healthful foods and providing point-of-purchase(POP) nutrition information (p. 1222).

In a study focused on providing point-of-purchase nutrition information, “where the goal was to help consumers make informed, healthful choices,” (p. 1224) Freedman and Connors found that there was “no significant difference in sales of any food item between baseline and intervention” (p. 1224).

Boyle and LaRose (2009) mentioned that according to the American College Health Association [ACHA] (2006), “approximately 36% of U.S. college students are estimated to currently be overweight or obese” (p.195). Boyle and LaRose (2009) also pointed out that, “The leading causes of being overweight or obese are physical inactivity, poor diet, finding that intra-personal, inter-personal and environmental factors affect college students’ physical activity and eating habits” (p. 195). The researchers referenced a 2004 study which found that self-efficacy was a significant predictor of physical activity and nutrition behaviors. “The higher the self-efficacy and the lower the perceived barriers to physical activity and nutrition, the more likely participants were to engage in protective behaviors, i.e., exercising three times per week and/ or eating well

(Von Ah, Ebert, Ngamvitroj, Park, & Kang, 2004)” (p. 195). In addition, Boyle and LaRose (2009) cited that, “environmental influences that impact college students’ physical activity and eating habits have also been identified: Buffet style cafeterias and excessive portions served at dining halls have been implicated in overeating and poor nutrition (Levitsky, Halbmaier, & Mrdjenovic, 2004)” (p. 195).

Boyle and LaRosa (2009) ultimately found that the influences on eating and physical activity may differ between overweight and healthy-weight students:

Overweight students may be more affected by their perceptions of their environments and the supports available to them from that environment, while healthy-weight students may be more affected by their personal beliefs, namely their confidence in their ability to exercise and eat healthfully. However, for both groups the fact that the study was a cross-sectional investigation precluded determining the temporality of the influences and the behaviors. Yet, the distinction between such potential influencing factors is an important one for campus prevention services (p. 199).

According to Andaleeb and Caskey (2007) improvements in food quality and selection, staff services and their behavior, and pricing may have the greatest payoff in terms of student satisfaction. Findings from a study conducted by Seymour, Yaroch, Serdula, Blanck, & Khan, (2004) suggested that “environmental and policy approaches to nutrition intervention can reach a wider audience than individual behavior-change strategies” (p. S117). Both of these studies implicated the need for improving the quality of food supplied to students.

Nutrition Education

Kwan et al. (2010), set out to study what kind of information students received about various health topics, how students received such information, and whether or not students believed the channels from which they received the information to be credible. What resulted from this study was the suggestion that universities should practice focusing on delivering believable messages to students through channels that they trust, ultimately shaping students' health-related social cognitions and behaviors. Results indicated that the two most cited topics students received information about were physical activity and fitness, as well as sexual assault prevention. Results of this study provide suggestions on how to inform students about healthy lifestyles in the future, as it indicates that only 17% of the sample having received health information received information about dietary/nutritional behaviors.

Researchers reported that college students have poor eating habits, and that many barriers exist to achieving optimal nutrition for that population (Cousineau, Goldstein, & Franko, 2004). In order to combat this roadblock, the researchers set out to develop an online nutrition resource geared toward college students through concept mapping; the six clusters included healthy eating on a budget, healthy meal planning, student personalization features, basic nutrition facts, body image or weight concerns, and expert nutrition information.

The findings from Haberman and Luffey's study on College Students' Diet and Exercise Behaviors (1998), suggested that students need further education to determine their ideal weight. Practitioners could screen students for chronic dieting and discuss realistic goals with them. "Although college health clinicians routinely provide

consultations for weight loss, eating disorders, and cholesterol control, the professional staff should consider expanding these services to include healthy nutrition topics” (p. 190).

Brener and Gowda (2001) claimed that, “Institutions of higher education are in a unique position to promote healthy behaviors by providing such programs [health promotion programs] to students” (p. 223). Further, the researchers discuss how in the year 2000, two national health objectives were related to health education and health promotion in post-secondary institutions. “Because certain characteristics exist among universities and the populations they serve, post-secondary institutions can foster the development and maintenance of health education and health promotion programs” (p. 223). These characteristics include:

The most common health issues faced by college students, such as sexuality, alcohol use, and fitness are related to lifestyle and personal behavior; college students tend to be receptive to educational programs, including those addressing personal improvement; the mission of these institutions is education, and healthy students are better learners; most college health services are financed through prepaid arrangements (i.e., tuition or fees), so the costs of programs are spread through the student body; and the college or university is a defined community, making it conducive to establishing community norms and organizational policies that can improve health (p. 233).

This study distributed a questionnaire where students could report the topics of health information they received from their institution, and the study found that, “The majority

of college students in the United States reported receiving some health information from their college or university” (p. 226). However, it found that:

The overall number of students reached, the coverage among subgroups, and the number of health topics covered should be increased. Only 6% of students received information on all of the health topics examined, which is far less than the [at that time] projected goal of 50% in the year 2000 (p. 227).

In the study, *Content Analysis: Review of Methods and Their Applications in Nutrition Education*, by Kondracki, Wellman, and Amundson (2002):

Content analysis (CA) is used to develop objective inferences about a subject of interest in any type of communication. The process of CA consists of coding raw messages (i.e., textual material, visual images, and illustrations) according to a classification scheme (p. 224).

Kondracki et al. (2002) found that:

Content analysis is useful in the evaluation of the nutrition content trends in journals, magazines, newspapers, textbooks, cookbooks, and other print and electronic media. It can be used in community or clinical settings, at universities, or wherever there are nutrition questions to be answered. Content analysis methods can lead to improvements in nutrition education and counseling techniques and ultimately affect client/consumer management, care, and outcomes. Content analysis methods can be used to improve consumer nutrition education materials including newsletters, brochures, and magazine and newspaper articles (p. 228).

Even though there is evidence backing up the dietary issues students face, as well as the kind of information they should receive regarding these issues, what research has not explored is the specific perceptions students hold that shape their current definitions of nutrition.

Theoretical Framework

In order to increase the likelihood of change, Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) has been creatively used by health educators and behavioral scientists to develop interventions, procedures, or techniques that influence cognitive variables (Baranowski, Perry, and Parcel, 2002). Based on the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001), human behavior is explained in terms of a triadic, dynamic, and reciprocal model in which behavior, personal factors (including cognition), and environmental influences all interact. SCT depicts behavior as dynamic, depending on aspects of the environment and the person, all of which influence each other simultaneously (Baranowski, Perry, and Parcel, 2002). According to Baranowski, Perry, and Parcel, “*reciprocal determinism* is described as the continuous interaction among the characteristics of a person, the behavior of that person, and the environment within which the behavior is performed; thus, these three components are constantly influencing each other” (p. 168).

Baranowski, Perry, and Parcel included that the term “*environment* refers to the objective factors that can affect a person’s behavior but that are physically external to that person” (p. 168), and “observational learning (which provides models for behavior) occurs when a person watches the actions of another person and the reinforcements that the person receives” (p. 170). Baranowski, Perry, and Parcel explained that, “Health educators and others interested in changing health behaviors must clearly specify their

targeted behavior; the concept of *behavior capability* maintains that if a person is to perform a particular behavior, he or she must know what the behavior is (knowledge of the behavior) and how to perform it (skill)” (p. 171). Frederiksen, Martin, and Webster (1979) stated that, “Behavior can be viewed at many different levels, from having a meal to eating a specific food to how many bites it took to chew a mouthful of food” (Baranowski, Perry, and Parcel, 2002, p. 171).

A limitation of the Social Cognitive Theory includes criticism that the theory is too comprehensive in nature. Therefore Baranowski, Perry, and Parcel (2002) suggested:

Both practitioners and investigators using SCT must specify the range of phenomena to which it applies, examine the situations in which the theory does not apply, and limit their claims about the utility of SCT to those that are supported by empirical evidence (p. 181).

The researcher used the Social Cognitive Theory to drive the study – forming the research questions to explore how personal, environmental, and physical behaviors influence college students in dining centers on this campus.

Summary

While this literature review explains such factors as knowledge of nutrition among college students, their nutrition environment and their food choice influencers, it does not explain whether or not students perceive their food options at a midsized, Midwest, public university to be healthy options, and what kind of behaviors are performed based on the food that is provided. This study sets out to explore the concept recognized so nicely by Freedman (2010, p. 565), “that diet and eating behaviors are influenced by availability and accessibility of foods.”

CHAPER III

Methods

This study utilized a qualitative approach (interviewing) for data collection and analysis. Qualitative research refers to research investigations of the quality of relationships, activities, situations, or material; more simply, researchers are interested in the quality of a particular activity, focusing on the process of how something happens rather than on just the outcomes or results (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2011). Because the research questions driving this study were designed to better understand dining habits in the context of personal, environmental, and physical behaviors driving students' choices, (e.g., What outside factors exist that contribute to or detract from healthy eating on this campus?) they are qualitative in nature, and therefore, qualitative methodology is the most appropriate approach for this study.

Study Design

The study was conducted by interviewing female students who had lived in an all-female hall, and held a meal plan at a Midwest, four-year, public university. Students were asked to discuss their individual perceptions of eating behaviors such as, what dining options were available, what they chose to eat, and why they made these choices. The researcher explored how students had been informed about nutrition, what choices they made in the dining centers, and what their perceptions were of the nutritional value of their options.

Participants

This study involved a sample of seven full-time undergraduate female students, in at least their second semester at a midsized, Midwest, public university. All participants

volunteered to participate in the study. Because variables in qualitative research are studied in their natural settings, the independent variable in this study would be the students' definition of health, with the dependent variable being students' perception of barriers preventing them from eating healthy. Demographics of participants were collected and assessed through data. Approximately 4,773 on-campus and off-campus students currently hold some form of a meal plan – including meal swipes to each of the dining centers, or dining dollars to the university food court, coffee shop, or market place convenience center.

The goal was to conduct interviews with at least six students, while the researcher's initial e-mail requested ten volunteers. Due to the nature of qualitative research, themes are emergent as more data is collected; thus, the researcher decided to request ten volunteers initially, and ended up only needing seven to determine best results.

Research Site

This study's research site is a midsized, Midwest, four-year, public university located in rural Illinois, with a community of about 10,000 students. The surrounding community makes up a total population of approximately 20,000 including college students. The specific research location is an all-female residence hall, to which one of three main dining halls on this campus is attached. All participants of this study are required to have an on-campus meal plan.

Instruments

Due to the nature of a qualitative study, the researcher was interested in how things occur, and particularly interested in the perspectives of the subjects of this study.

This resulted in the researcher being the main instrument in collecting data (by conducting interviews). The interview questions were designed to explore the context in which students chose their meals, based on environmental, behavioral, and personal factors (see Appendix A).

Data Collection

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board to conduct research, the researcher began data collection (see Appendix B). Recruitment was done based on a call-to-action via e-mail, sent out to an all-female residence hall at the institution. First, the researcher sent an e-mail to the residence hall directors informing them of the research that was taking place, and that their residents would be receiving this call-to-action e-mail requesting volunteers. The purpose of reaching out to the residence hall directors was to seek the directors' support in conducting the research in their building, as well as to encourage their student staff members and hall leaders to volunteer. In order to obtain the list of e-mails for all of the residents living in the building, the researcher requested the list through the Assistant Director for Residential Communications. Once the e-mail list was provided to the researcher, the e-mail call-to-action was sent out.

The researcher first sent the call-to-action e-mail to the entire residence hall in the seventh week of the spring 2015 semester, asking for volunteers (see Appendix C). The e-mail call-to-action sent to the residence hall residents informed recipients of the estimated length of the interview, the anticipated time-frame in which the interviews would take place, and the location where the researcher would conduct each interview, which was in the residence hall's study lounge located in the building's lobby.

As the initial call-to-action only accrued two volunteers, the researcher sent an e-mail to the hall directors one week later requesting continued support of the study, combined with a second call-to-action e-mail that was sent out to the entire building (in week eight of the 2015 spring semester). This second call-to-action e-mail accrued one more participant for the study. The researcher had a fourth participant volunteer due to a fellow cohort member who knew about the study, and knew that one of her student leader's lived in the building where the research was being conducted, and therefore, encouraged the student leader to volunteer.

The researcher determined that still more interviews were necessary to discover common themes among data, so a separate e-mail was sent to the student leaders in the building (student staff members and hall council members) in week eleven of the 2015 spring semester, accruing one more participant. A third, and final, e-mail call-to-action was sent to the entire residence hall in week twelve of the 2015 spring semester, accruing one additional participant, and a final e-mail was sent to the student leaders of the building, accruing the final participant.

Participants who volunteered were interviewed in weeks ten through fourteen of the 2015 spring semester. Individual interviews were conducted with each participant and lasted approximately fifteen minutes.

Data Analysis

Interviews took place in a study lounge in the all-female residence hall from which participants were recruited. Responses to interviews were recorded via laptop audio recording application. The researcher played back each interview for transcription through Microsoft Word. In order to find emergent themes, the researcher then printed

each transcription, and used the constant comparative method through axial coding.

According to Boeije (2002), “by comparing, the researcher is able to do what is necessary to develop a theory more or less inductively, namely categorizing, coding, delineating categories and connecting them” (p. 393). This enabled the researcher to find themes among the participants’ answers.

CHAPTER IV

Participants were instructed prior to interviews that their name would remain anonymous. In order to do this, the researcher has assigned pseudonyms to each participant. Below is a table of self-reported participant demographics:

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Name	Year in School	Major	Nutrition Education
Amy	Senior	Family Consumer Sciences, Concentration Family Services	Some academic courses in Major
Beth	Sophomore	Nursing	Watches portions
Carrie	Sophomore	Communications	Vegan
Dawn	Sophomore	Psychology Major, Double Minor: Women's Studies/Family Consumer Sciences	Health-conscious due to high school academic courses
Emily	Freshman	Biological Science, Minor Pre-Vet Med	High school foundations course
Faith	Sophomore	Communication Disorder Studies	Not very good
Grace	Sophomore	Elementary Education	High school health course, no interest in healthy eating

Results

The ultimate goal of the present study was to investigate college students' experiences regarding healthy eating in university dining centers on a midsized, Midwest, public university campus. Through questions rooted in the Social Cognitive Theory, the researcher explored how personal, environmental, and physical behaviors factors influenced students' eating habits. Prior to hearing about the participants' dining experiences, the researcher chose to first evaluate whether students had any interest in healthy eating at all.

This chapter is a presentation of the results from the qualitative data collected through participant interviews. Demographics were collected in conversation before asking a series of three questions, based on each of the pillars of the Social Cognitive Theory – personal factors, environmental factors, and physical behaviors influencing the participants' food choices on campus. Additional probes to each research question included asking the participants to describe their meals, asking them which dining hall they frequent most and why, and prompting them to expand on information they may have mentioned, but the researcher felt it was best to further discuss.

Interview Analysis

Results below are discussed in the order of the research questions proposed as listed in Chapter III. These research questions inquire about the significance of factors influencing students' eating habits. The independent variable in this study was each participant's definition of health, which ranged from exercising a strict vegan diet, to not being concerned with eating healthy at all. The dependent variable in this study was each student's perception of barriers preventing them from eating healthy, which ranged from

a lack of variety, to a lack of fresh food options. Using a constant comparative method through axial coding, the researcher discovered the following themes as presented in the interviews:

Research Question 1

How do students perceive the importance of healthy eating habits on this campus?

In total, there wasn't a high-level of nutrition education, nor a particularly high level of interest in eating healthy; only one out of seven participants self-disclosed actually knowing a lot about healthy eating/nutrition information.

In response to the questions, "what is your level of nutrition education?" and "what are your observations of the dining experience at this institution?" Amy indicated, "I try to eat as healthy as I can, but I don't think it's possible with dorm food." Amy talked about eating a diet including "some fruit/veggies, less soda, more water, all in moderation."

Beth talked about healthy meaning portion-control to her. With a busy lifestyle, Beth doesn't have time to go to gym, so she tries to create variety in her meals.

According to Carrie, choosing to eat a vegan diet was the best definition of health, "for me personally, I am really into it [healthy eating]. I've been a vegan for a year... That was one of the things that made me interested in doing this [interview], because I would like to discuss the lack of options here." By experiencing a vegan diet, Carrie claims she has seen a large improvement in her health.

Dawn stated that the nutrition classes she took in high school were eye opening. She believed they caused a "subconscious shift change," where she began to choose fruit

rather than junk food. Dawn claimed that her classes “opened a new door to looking at making healthy choices,” on top of encouraging her to pick-up running as stress-reliever.

Additionally, Emily explained her level of nutrition education as: her required high school nutrition class, as well as her foundations course as a first year in college, which provided a brief discussion on “eating right.”

In the same vein, Faith mentioned that her level was “not very good.” The extent to which her education existed pertained to the standard lessons she was taught growing up.

Grace talked about her high school health class being the highest level of education received, “I don’t really have any other education on it, and I really don’t have any interest in it either,” as she laughed.

Research Question 2

What outside factors exist that contributes to or detracts from healthy eating on this campus?

Contribute:

Some of the factors that may contribute to eating healthy on this campus are derived in family/cultural influence. Beth talked about her family’s contribution to her health stating that, “when I came to campus freshman year, I lost 15 pounds... My family’s food culture is greasy, Hispanic, and fried; and there is always a lot of pop,” she now is so involved on campus, that she often takes her food to go due to her busy schedule, which provides her a unique advantage to eating healthy – portion control.

Detract:

Amy talked about the environment of the dining halls being crowded, and how sometimes, “I just don’t really want to wait that long for food.”

The comfort of living at home vs. living on campus is another factor that can detract from eating healthy on campus. Carrie talked about being able to incorporate raw fruits at breakfast and lunch, dinner rice/whole grains and veggies at home, but “here, it is a lot harder; it’s weird to eat like five bananas at a time at cafeteria; so I’ll try to find out what hall is having a big amount of cooked vegetables, and then for lunch, I’ll just eat a plate of veggies.”

Friends are another component when making food choices; Carrie talked about receiving pressure from friends to go out for ice cream, or deciding whether or not to “eat just one more burger; it is easy to ‘slip up.’” Beth talked about getting her meals to go, “since I’m busy, I take it to go, which is the best health conscious way to make decisions, because when I’m with my friends, they get, for example, there are turkey burgers, I get a turkey burger, and they get a burger, with a bunch of fries, and cheese, and chili on top; they get very creative with what they eat, and then they go around for desserts.”

Emily talked about the confines of eating on campus, “poor college students, can’t afford to buy foods outside of this; so we are forced to eat the dining hall foods; it does suck, because I would love to have something else, other than the dining food; but sometimes they do have good stuff, even though sometimes it is relatively bad; I do still go for the salads; I only go for the salads,” (Emily). In an account of her fellow resident, the participant spoke about gluten-intolerance, and the challenge to eat gluten-friendly meals on campus. While the dining hall is aware of this diet restriction, and can provide

the student special meals, Emily voiced that her friend doesn't like the options available to her, "she doesn't like it, because it sucks; she is almost forced to deal with the disgusting food, or dig into her savings to get food."

Neither Contribute nor Detract:

Several students talked about friends being an external factor affecting their food choices, but neither stated whether friends' influencing their eating habits contributed nor detracted from eating healthy. Dawn stated, "I won't go eat by myself, I hate to eat by myself." Faith echoed this opinion saying, "I usually go with them, and do whatever; we always usually just go to the same place, but if they want to go somewhere, I usually go, or I'll get it to go if I really don't want what they're having."

Grace talked about, "The only external influence would probably be class or just limited time to go eat, sleep" affecting her eating habits. "I put napping before eating sometimes. Sometimes I feel like I'm so busy that there is no time to eat, or I might have to skip a meal here and there. I've never really felt like that before this year," Grace claimed.

Research Question 3

What is the extent to which the dining centers contribute to or detract from healthy eating on this campus?

The university has three different dining centers available, each providing a different list of menu options. As discussed in the following results, each dining center on this institution's campus is known for its own characteristics.

Contribute:

One of the factors contributing to eating healthy on this campus included convenience. Having to buy a meal plan through campus dining centers in closer proximity than off-campus restaurants or grocery stores, added to Beth's holistic college experience. Beth has seen improvements over the last two years stating, "It's gotten better; like they've provided more variety," and has even found a way to combat the instance where she would get tired of the options being provided. She claimed, "I get creative. If I don't like something that any of the three dining halls offer, I get creative and make something. Like one time I made a salad. I used all the salad bar, and then there were strawberries, I used that, with the oils they had, and everything. I just try to use what I can," and stated that she did find it easy to create something healthy. Beth also discussed that at least one dining hall on campus is known to have healthier salads, healthier sandwiches/sides, "when I started going to the gym, I used to always go to [a particular dining center] because I know they have the better salads. They have the healthier sandwiches."

She also voiced her appreciation of the buffet style atmosphere, stating that it creates an environment for internal self-control, "I watch what I eat; you have to control; that's the good thing, I like it because it provides a sense of control, internally."

In addition, Beth mentioned, "They do a really good job on providing food for vegetarians, especially at [a particular dining center]. Because you know, at [a second dining center] it's always either chicken, pork, beef, and then at [the first dining center], you have variety, like the wraps, the garden burger, turkey burger, fuse burger, they do a really good job incorporating that."

Dawn mentioned, “I definitely like the different options. If I don’t want something that’s there, I just get cereal.” This at least provides the sense that there is still one more option when not satisfied with the rest provided.

Additionally, Grace is a resident assistant on campus, and is provided 15 meals a week due to her position. “This is basically all I eat, except for weekends; sometimes I’ll order something on weekends. Being an RA, you get 15 meal swipes, so, I don’t ever run out.”

Faith talked about the nutrition facts provided for most meals in the dining centers, “I know they have the cards telling you the nutrition stuff, all the nutritional value, but I feel like they *just* started doing that.”

Beth and Faith talked about the ability to easily access the dining center menus through the campus’ online application. Beth stated, “I jump around in variety; I always check the dining menu before I go anywhere and make my decision to eat.” When asked about which dining hall she frequents most, Faith stated, “It depends, because I have that app. where it’ll tell you what they have... We’ll usually pick [a particular dining center] because it’s close, but if we really don’t like what they’re having there, we’ll go to like [a second dining center] or [a third dining center].” Each dining center’s menu is posted daily for students to reference at the tip of their fingers in order to make a decision that best suits their needs for that specific meal.

Detract:

One factor detracting from eating healthy on campus is that the dining options provided, “they could improve variety; there are the same foods every day,” according to

Amy. Amy believes that the dining centers “do have some healthy stuff, but it is hidden by fattening, unhealthy stuff.”

Carrie talked about her transition from eating at home to eating on campus with such a strict diet, “Once coming here, I was still vegan, but I was eating not so nutritional things like, I eat peanut butter sandwiches like seven times a day, which is not ideal,” she claimed. This is the disadvantage she faces now that she no longer has the pro of being at home, where she had her own kitchen and claims, “I could do what I wanted.” “And here, if I go to the food courts or something, all I can eat is lettuce, and hummus.”

Coming here has made her less strict, “since coming here, there have been circumstances where – I was extremely strict about it at home; and then something would happen here, and I’d be like ‘oh okay, I feel like I have to eat this cheese for this one meal,’ but I would immediately feel it,” (i.e., fatigued, bloated). She talked about how, “the lack of options here have made me fall into slippery territory; where I haven’t eaten meat, but I’ll fall into dairy occasionally,” (Carrie).

Carrie later continued, “I feel like they have a wide variety of options, but no matter where you go, everywhere is like a ‘Golden Corral Buffet;’ it’s all just like bad options for you; and especially for me.” This environment has resulted in her going to Wal-Mart at times to get a completely different lunch because she says, “I can’t eat anything here.” In addition, when she referenced other people who still choose to eat healthy, but who incorporate more variety in their diet than a vegan diet, she feels that based on these options, those persons would ultimately “slip up.” It all came down to one point for her: “Lack of knowledge could cause unhealthy eating... People who know something is bad for them, but not knowing *how* bad it is for them.”

Dawn indicated that the dining centers “have made progress since last year; I still love the blackberry cobbler, so I know it’s hard to make a complete shift to ‘no more unhealthy stuff,’” and that, the dining centers “have a good salad bar – but I get tired of eating same things over & over again,” (Dawn). Further, Dawn claimed, “I definitely like the different options; I know sometimes like the fruit isn’t... I think it’s been sitting out for a while and it’s like, ‘do I eat it do I not eat it?’” She sometimes questions the freshness of the fruit, “like, eek! I don’t know if I’d eat those,” in reference to carrots and grapes provided as sides.

When asked for her observations of this campus’ dining atmosphere, Emily claimed, “I did see that a lot of the foods here can get you fat. So I had to pick-up skateboarding to lose the excess weight that I gained. By the time I noticed I was gaining weight, I had already got tired of the food any way,” (Emily). When asked about her experiences in the dining centers in terms of the university’s engagement in healthy eating, Emily claimed, “They could be more engaged in healthy eating.” In addition, she stated “the food repeats too much, so you get sick of it soon... So it makes you want to go for the ice cream, or the pop sodas, because that’s really good stuff, it’s hard to not want that.” Emily stated that the dining centers “don’t really scream, ‘eat healthy!’ – they do have a selection of fruits, but, I think that they could bring in more fruits; it doesn’t have to always just be apples, oranges and bananas.” She proceeded to talk about the salad bar options, but hesitated; claiming that it “takes a lot to make it good; which turns it into a bad thing... But it’s a lot better than some of the food that they do make here.” When asked to elaborate on whether or not her opinion on the salad bar was due to quality or toppings, she claimed, “we don’t even know if it’s fresh or not, because

we're not behind the kitchen. And even they might not know, because they're just unpacking it... Any food can be, chemically re-preserved or something... But they do have a wide-selection." "If they really want to promote healthy eating, then stop getting fattening dressings, or fattening foods, because it's too easy to get fat in college." "The foods here, it will taste good for a long time, but you will get sick of the dining food, period."

Faith believes that the dining centers influence her choices a lot, "Just because what they have every day, so you have to pick and choose from what they have." Additionally, she commented, "The salad doesn't really look that great. I love salad. I have always had salad. It's just so small, and gross." that the dining centers are, "Not that engaged in healthy eating, because they have so much junk; I like to eat healthy at home, I don't really like the food they have here that much... I don't think they have good choices... I know they have the cards telling you all the nutritional value, but I feel like they just started doing that just recently," (Faith).

Grace echoed, "It honestly depends on how good it looks that day. If it doesn't look good, I'm not going to eat it. Most of the time, I feel like the fruit doesn't look that good; it looks just old and expired." "Last year, I felt that the dining menus were more appealing; this year, I never really feel like nothing's sticking out to me, like I don't really want to go to the dining hall for dinner." "Sometimes, the fruit just doesn't look good; like the bananas are brown, and I'd just rather make it look more presentable... I don't know what it is, but last year I felt like, I could at least pick from two dining centers; this year, I just feel like the quality has gone down, like nothing is appealing to me. I don't know the pasta, pizza and tacos aren't for me anymore."

Summary

Chapter IV reported the results of the data analysis for the present study. It was found that there were three major themes throughout the study: the majority of participants claimed their highest level of nutrition education was through high school health courses, with only one participant claiming a personal investment in eating healthy; a majority of the participants would like to see more variety and fresher dining options (with a consensus that improvements could be made within the dining centers (even though Beth claimed she had seen improvements in variety provided in the last two years), and after the researcher reflected on all of the data collected, it appears that the most profound factor affecting healthy eating is personal knowledge of nutrition, coupled with the investment in and motivation to make healthy choices.

Using the Social Cognitive Theory constructs, personal, environmental, and physical behaviors, it appears that both the personal drive and the environmental atmosphere of the campus' dining centers influence participants' behaviors, however, the personal construct carried more weight in influencing these behaviors. Because the answers of seven participants varied so drastically, ranging from Carrie with a strict, vegan diet, to Grace who isn't even concerned with eating healthy, it is evident that the topic of eating healthy is defined and valued differently from person to person across an entire university's population. Beth commented, when asked about the reasons behind eating healthy versus non-healthy, "I think it depends on that person, and how they were raised, or how they view their healthy personally."

CHAPTER V

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate college students' experiences regarding healthy eating in university dining centers. By discussing students' eating habits and the factors that influence their meal choices, the researcher gained insight to the experiences of seven different students on a midsized, Midwest campus. In closing her interview, Emily remarked, "I just want to say that the dining hall foods can be a lot healthier than they are now; and if they actually try, they can save a lot more money; it will be better for all of us."

Discussion

Faith mentioned that, "I think it's my personal cravings," which influence whether or not to eat healthy. Additionally, Dawn stated, "I guess it's like, my mental, I *choose* to get a salad, and then I make sure that I have a vegetable, or like apple sauce." Because all participants alluded to making meal choices based on their personal values, the strongest factor behind eating habits appears to be a personal influence in making meal choices. The researcher concluded that a personal belief-set was the strongest factor influencing student choices because it was the factor that each of the seven participants had in common. Whether this personal drive is self-control, nutrition awareness, lack of interest in nutrition, or the conscious encouragement to allow a "splurge," like Beth indicated, "If I'm craving something greasy, I make sure I watch my portions, or let myself pig-out one day, and regret it the next," personal influence on eating habits is done no matter the level of nutrition education or motivation a person possesses.

Strengths of the Study

One strength of this study proved to be the timing of the study. By the time the interviews were conducted, participants had been exposed to the institution's dining centers for at least a semester and a half. This allowed the participants to become familiar with each of the three dining centers on-campus, in order to provide a rich opinion of their observations.

Another strength of this study was the location from which the participants were selected. The participants all resided in the same residential building on campus, and this building was attached to one of three campus dining centers. Because each of the participants lived on-campus, it was mandatory to have a university-provided meal plan; thus, all participants regularly ate at the university's on-campus dining centers.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations to this study include researcher bias and lack of time to conduct the study, and lack of an incentive for participants to volunteer. Because the researcher began requesting participants in the eleventh week of the semester, there was not much time to waste, and therefore, interviews really could not extend beyond three to four weeks post-call-to-action e-mail efforts. This also prevented the ability to conduct any follow-up interviews where the researcher could have asked participants to expand on certain topics that reached only the surface level during data collection. Even though the researcher sent out multiple e-mail blasts, there was not much of a push for participants to volunteer, therefore, the researcher had to spam the inboxes of the residents for recruitment.

Additionally, researcher bias could be a limitation in regard to the interpretation of participant responses, as the researcher is the main instrument of the study. As the researcher is heavily invested in healthy eating, the researcher could have allowed bias to misinterpret participants' answers. However, as a qualitative researcher, it was my responsibility to recognize my bias and set it aside in order to truly hear the voices of my participants. I realized early on that with the responses I was collecting, I had to be very open to a wide variety of perceptions, and ultimately, a diverse spectrum of personal beliefs of healthy eating. Each of the participants placed value on eating healthy very differently from the next. This study proved to uncover a very complex topic in regard to eating habits.

Recommendations

For the Study

Because of the lack of time (a span of only three to four weeks), it would be advisable for a researcher to try to conduct interviews over the course of an academic semester, or even a full academic year. Additionally, implementing an incentive, such as a raffle for participants to be entered into, could create more of a reason for participants to volunteer.

For Future Research

Because this study observed all-female students future researchers might consider comparing the experiences of different sub-populations, i.e. athletes, all males, etc. Additionally, as interviews voiced the experiences of participants' cumulative years dining on campus, researchers might choose to conduct a longitudinal study, following a

class of incoming freshmen through to their senior year, to observe how perceptions of dining centers or behaviors of dining habits vary from year to year.

For the Campus Dining Center

Because Cousineau, Goldstein, & Franko (2004) suggest the importance of using students' suggestions in developing nutrition programs, this study is extremely beneficial for the campus dining centers. It is clear that students want a variety. Whether they commit to a strict diet (vegan), or lack interest in eating healthy at all, students still want more variety, and fresh options. Most of these participants acknowledged fruit in the dining halls not always being appetizing, and due to this factor, at times, these participants refrained from incorporating any fruit in their diets.

For Health Educators

This study found that eating habits are very personal. To the individual student, such influences as culture/family, friends, class/extracurricular schedule, and mental attitude all combine when choosing what to eat for each meal, (or whether to eat at all). It is suggested that health educators assess/screen incoming freshmen for preconceived attitudes and behaviors regarding healthy eating in order to provide personalized nutrition education.

For Faculty

Most of the participants in this study did not receive nutrition education past the high school level. It would be nice to see professors outside of nutritionally-focused courses to place an emphasis on nutrition/healthy eating. One way of doing this is to require students to take a nutritionally-focused course as a graduation requirement. This

way, education goes beyond the high school level, and students are exposed to on-going trends that emerge within the health field.

For Students

I would encourage students not to stop educating themselves on nutrition facts, simply because their school system may stop educating them about nutrition. As a firm believer in always asking questions, always digging deeper, I would advise the students of higher education to do the same when it comes to nourishing their bodies.

Summary

It is evident that each student brings a very diverse and complex approach to eating habits in the university setting. Every individual defines healthy eating very differently, and each participant attributed their level of nutrition education to varying life experiences. The most prominent theme produced through this study is that there is no single “cookie-cutter” approach when it comes to serving meals to an entire student body population. Because each student brings with them a completely different taste, desire, and value in terms of the food they choose to nourish their body with, administrators must try to cater to a very complex “list of requirements” when providing meal options.

As a researcher who strives to make conscious, informed decisions about eating healthy, it would be ideal to stress to administrators how important it is to serve healthy, fresh food options to our students in higher education. However, a health movement must start with educating the students, and allowing them to continue to make the choices they view as best for their personal journeys. The results of this research can assist the university in providing health-conscious options to students in the future.

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Appendix A – Instrument

Demographics

- Background? Why EIU? Major?
- Involvement outside of classroom?
- Level of nutrition education

What are your observations of dining experience at EIU?

- Perspective/interest/concerned/engaged in healthy eating?

To what extent does this campus's dining centers influence your eating habits?

What external factors influence your dining experience?

- Reasons behind healthy vs. non-healthy eating in the halls
- Friends, etc.?

Anything else?

Appendix B – IRB Approval

February 23, 2015

Erica Stayer
Counseling and Student Development

Thank you for submitting the research protocol titled, “An Exploration of the Barriers Preventing College Students from Eating Healthy at a Midsized Midwest University: A Qualitative Approach” for review by the Eastern Illinois University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has reviewed this research protocol and effective 2/18/2015, has certified this protocol meets the federal regulations exemption criteria for human subjects research. The protocol has been given the IRB number 15-033. You are approved to proceed with your study.

The classification of this protocol as exempt is valid only for the research activities and subjects described in the above named protocol. IRB policy requires that any proposed changes to this protocol must be reported to, and approved by, the IRB before being implemented. You are also required to inform the IRB immediately of any problems encountered that could adversely affect the health or welfare of the subjects in this study. Please contact me, or the Compliance Coordinator at 581-8576, in the event of an emergency. All correspondence should be sent to:

Institutional Review Board
c/o Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
Telephone: 217-581-8576
Fax: 217-581-7181
Email: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

Thank you for your cooperation, and the best of success with your research.

Richard Cavanaugh, Chairperson
Institutional Review Board
Telephone: 217-581-6205
Email: recavanaugh@eiu.edu

Appendix C – Call-to-Action E-mail

“To the Women of Andrews Hall,

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by E. Jordan Stayer, a Graduate Student in the Department of Counseling and Student Development at Eastern Illinois University. You have been asked to participate in this study because you are a resident of Andrews Hall.

The primary purpose of this study is to explore the barriers to eating healthy on this campus. Participants who have had a meal plan (and in turn, have lived on campus) for at least 3 semesters, and who are especially interested in/concerned with healthy eating will benefit most. There is no risk for participating, and your participation will help EIU in meeting the future needs of its students. All data collected will be aggregate, and cannot be linked to any single individual. Any information that is obtained will remain confidential. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.

Interviews will be audio-recorded, should take no more than 45 minutes to complete, and will take place within the next two to three weeks. Please respond if you would like to participate in this study. If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact: E. Jordan Stayer (Principal investigator) – ejstayer@eiu.edu, or Dr. Nadler (Faculty sponsor) – nadler@eiu.edu.

I look forward to hearing from you!”