

An ethnographic study of student eating habits at Parkland

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Introduction:

Our research question was broad as we chose to examine the eating habits of Parkland students and how it may affect their performance in the classroom. We also chose to focus on how Parkland students' eating/snacking habits have changed since being at Parkland compared to high school or wherever they snacked before becoming college students.

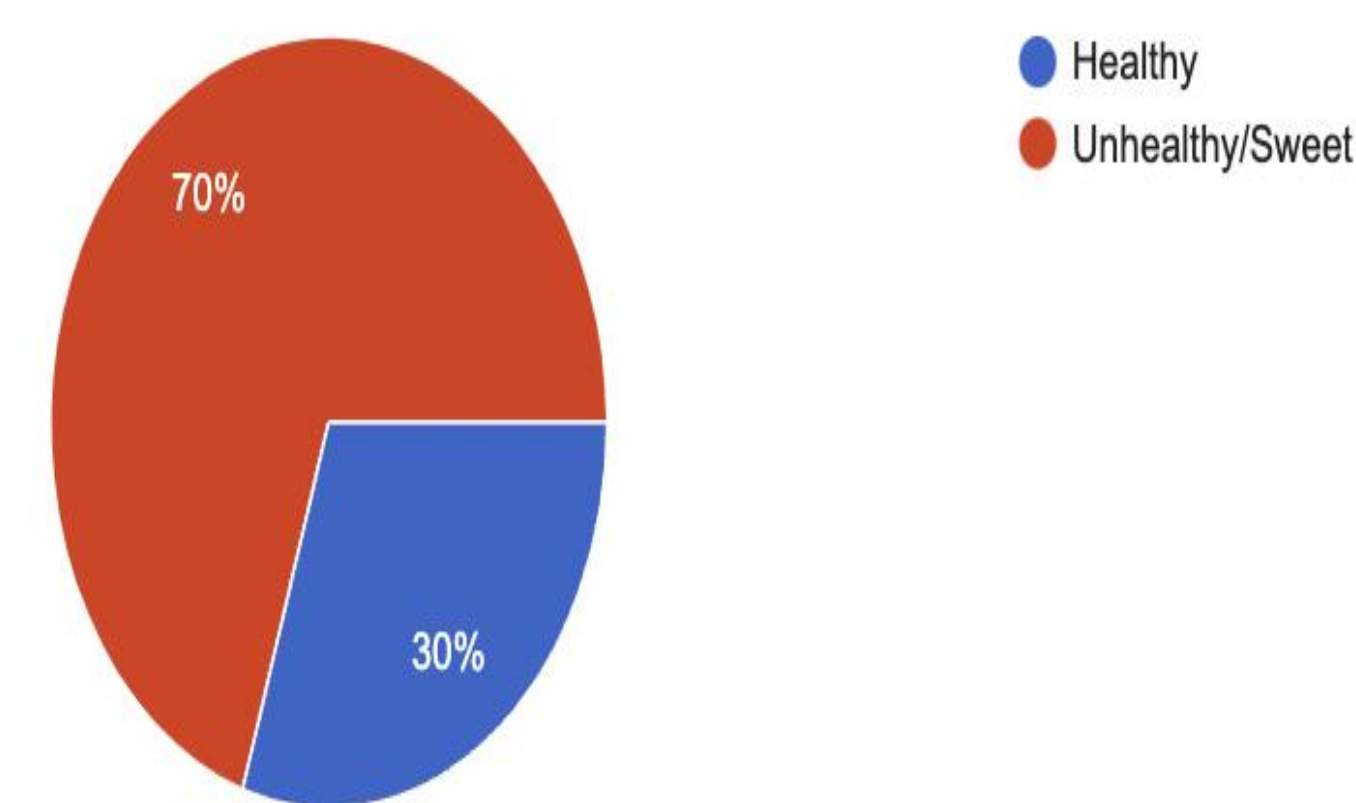
From our cultural anthropology course, we understand that food and eating habits are part of the "everyday actions that reflect cultural ideas" and can be studied to define the identity of a group (Miller Griffith and Marion 2020). Our research will reflect part of the identity of Parkland students through their habits.

Methods: Survey

We collected part of our data through an online survey. This survey was conducted using Google Forms. All collected responses to the survey were and remain anonymous. The questions asked in this survey are used to gather information regarding the change and regularity of snacking among Parkland College students. This survey received 20 responses from current students. We purposefully searched for a diverse group in terms of gender, race, and age. The following bar graphs show that Parkland students consume a much greater proportion of unhealthy than healthy snacks, and that these habits are brought over from before attending college.

What type of snack do you prefer/eat most often

20 responses

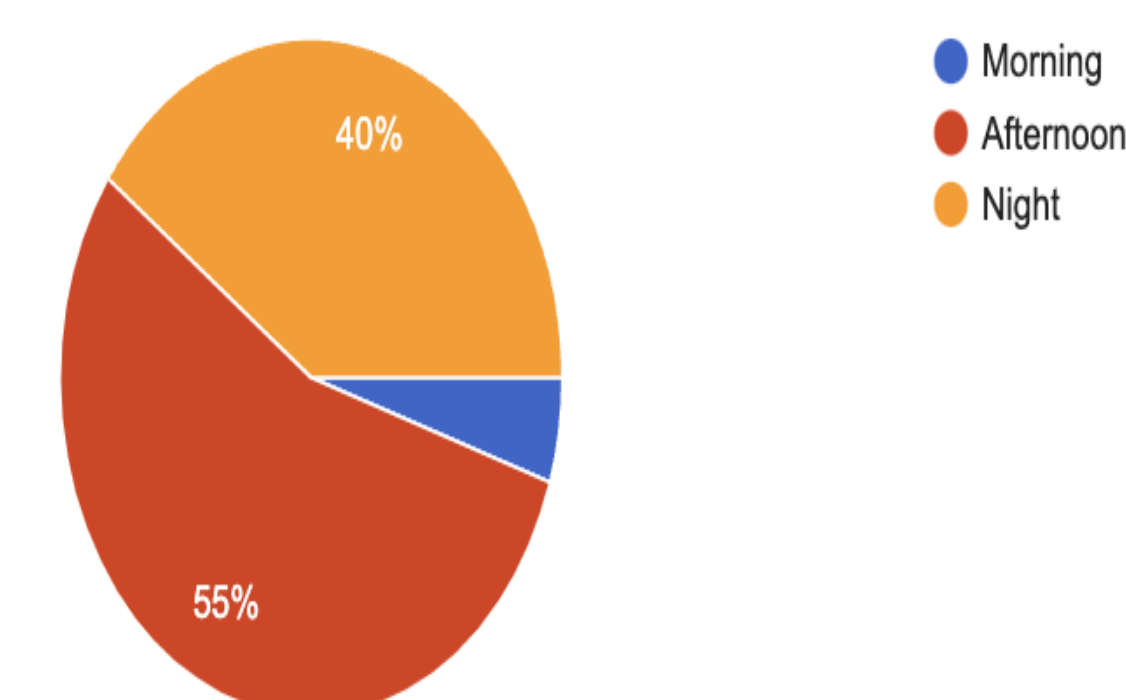


The pie graph above notes that most students surveyed, prefer an unhealthy snack over a healthy snack



Chips and salsa was the most common snack from students we surveyed

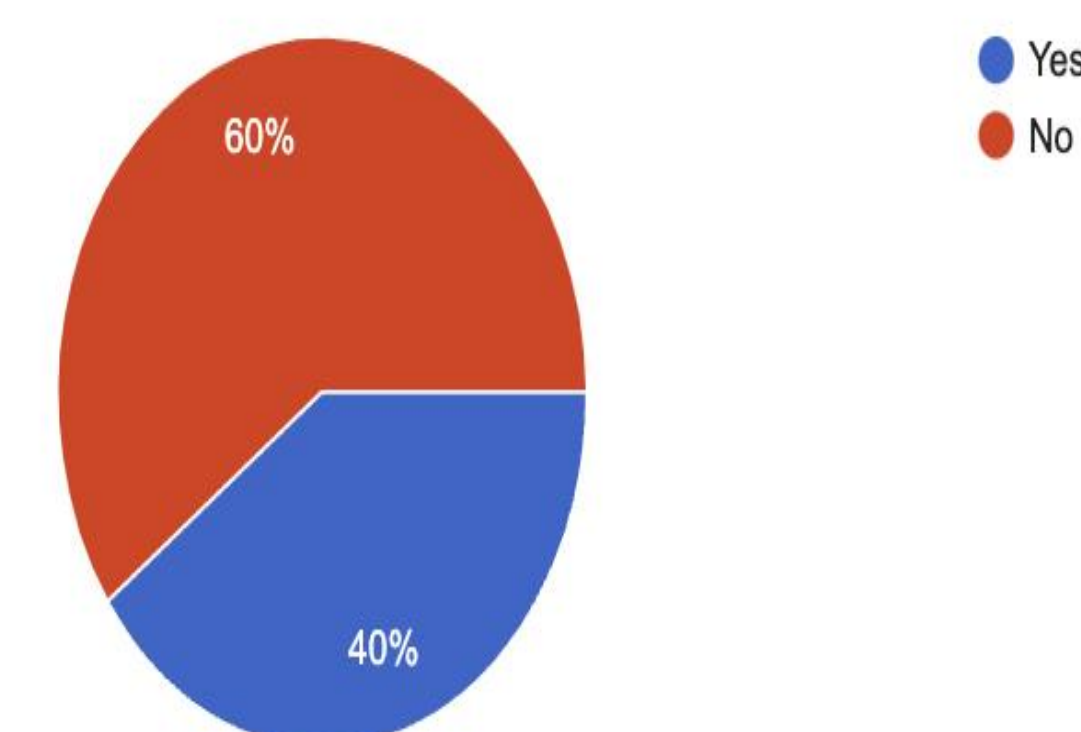
20 responses



What time of the day do Parkland students snack most often? The pie chart shows that most students tend to snack in the afternoon, closely followed by the morning. Given that peak class hours are offered at Parkland late morning through early afternoon, it seems that students are doing most of their snacking at school.

Have your snacking habits changed since being a student at Parkland? (ex. amount you snack, when you snack, what you eat etc.)

20 responses



The majority of Parkland students we surveyed have not changed their snacking habits since being a student at Parkland, which leads us to believe that unhealthy snacks are a habit that they acquired when attending High School and that they continued as part of their school habits in college.

Methods: Interviews

We interviewed Parkland college professors who teach Nutrition and Psychology and asked questions about eating habits. Here are the main points from our interview results.

- Student brains function better throughout the day if a high protein meal is consumed early in the day.
- A big issue with students today has to do with cooking. Students are not prepared enough when they move on their own for college in regard to cooking. A lot of students do not know how to cook their own meals, or meals that they like, which leads to them going hungry.
- In order to understand student and adolescent food habits, the interviewees recommended looking up YouTube videos or reading children cookbooks to get a basic understanding on the beginnings of cooking or on how children are taught to cook. These lessons on the relation to food last into adulthood.
- There are no noticeable differences of eating habits between males and females in the classes of these professors. Both genders tend to eat unhealthy snacks.
- An unhealthy snack is better than no snacks at all because energy is needed to progress through the day.
- No fuel from food equals a huge distraction in the classroom.
- If there were healthier options available for comparable prices, students would be healthier. A recommendation that could be made to Parkland would be to change the items found in our vending machines so healthier food is available to students who don't have time to prepare meals or sit down to each lunch.
- A recommendation for future research would be to examine the closest food bank for access to basic food needs: the Wesley Food Pantry. Parkland has a food pantry that serves both the community at large and Parkland students.

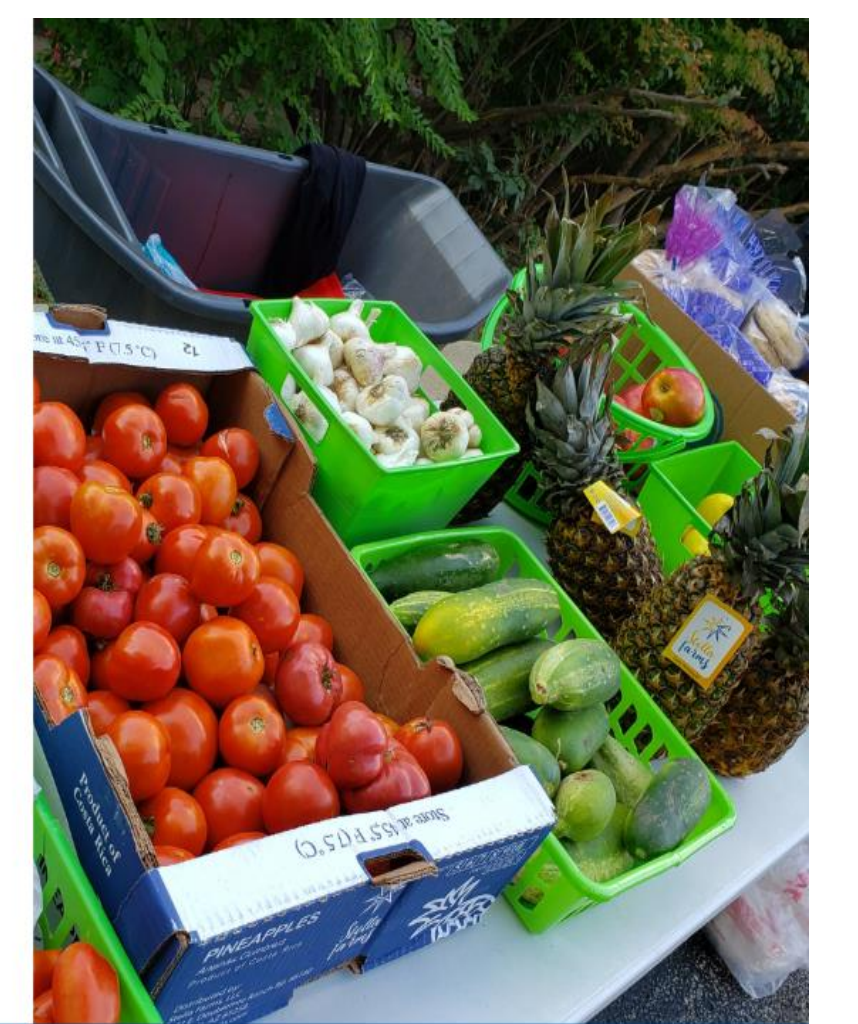
Set yourself up for success by feeding your brain with the proper fuel.

WESLEY
FOOD PANTRY

FOOD & NUTRITION ASSISTANCE

WEDNESDAYS, 1PM-3PM
1st & 3rd SATURDAYS, 10AM-NOON
RM. M-138, enter from the exterior door

www.wesleypantry.org @wesleyfoodpantry @wesleypantry



Findings/Discussion

Most Parkland students tend to choose an unhealthy/sweet option (70% of students) to snack on rather than a healthy option (30%), according to answers collected through surveys and from the interviews to professors who observe these behaviors in their classes. Parkland students have a wide variety of favorite snack options that they choose from when they are hungry. These options range from fruits, such as apples and bananas, to varieties of different candies and chips. From our surveys we learned that the snacks that are chosen to be eaten most often by Parkland students are cookies and Cheez-it's, and that the most common preferred snack was chips and salsa. Sixty percent of students surveyed say that they had no change in their snacking habits since becoming a student at Parkland, while 40% did.

This project helped us better understand Parkland student snack eating habits. We believe that it would be useful to expand on this topic and use the results to help incoming and current Parkland students. Based on these very preliminary findings we would recommend that they learn to cook as this helps when trying to eat healthy, save money, and overall eat things that you enjoy. We also would recommend students choose eating healthy snacks, as it can help a balanced diet, but if an unhealthy snack is your only option, it is better than nothing if you are starving because it can give you good energy.

References

Images credit: <https://www.thechunkychef.com/restaurant-salsa/>
<https://www.parkland.edu/Main/About-Parkland/Department-Office-Directory/Student-Life/Student-Life-Resources/Wesley-Food-Pantry>

Reference: "Performance" by Lauren Miller Griffith and Jonathan S. Marion. In *Perspectives: An Open Invitation to Cultural Anthropology*. 2020.

