

“ IF YOU'RE TOO HUNGRY, YOU CAN'T THINK STRAIGHT — WHICH KIND OF IMPEDES BEING A GOOD STUDENT.

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Because Textbooks Don't Taste All That Great

AS FOOD BANK USE ON THE RISE ACROSS THE PROVINCE, POST-SECONDARY STUDENTS HAVE MORE THAN EVER

term “starving student” gains new meaning in the wake of Food Banks Canada report of a 61 per cent increase in usage of Alberta food banks since March 2008.

For many students, fears about increases in the cost of living, proposed tuition hikes, unemployment, and rent payments often rank high on the priority list than filling your stomach. “It’s not always enough to make ends meet as a student,” says Carly Smith, a third-year University of Alberta student and food bank user. “Sometimes it’s hard to make the decision to go to the food bank, but if you’re too hungry, you can’t think straight — which kind of impedes being a good student.”

Edmonton post-secondary food banks are doing their best to provide as numbers of student clients steadily increase. The University of Alberta campus food bank’s tagline is “... because you can’t eat your textbooks.” And its executive director Meaghan Goebel is seeing more repeat clients than ever before. “In October, 16 per cent of the 80 hamper requests were for repeat clients,” she says. “That means those clients are coming to us more than once a month, and that’s new.”

Goebel says generally the breakdown of clients is 75 per cent adults and 25 per cent children, with many mature students with families using the service. And while campus food banks are seeing more annual usage, sometimes the monthly numbers can fluctuate. In September, the campus food bank helped 142 adults and 46 children, and in October, 126 adults and 46 children. “Our former executive director told me more people used the service last year because of scare tactics when the recession hit,” Goebel says. “Now the actual need is a reality, there’s a greater reliance on the food bank than we’ve seen in recent years.”

When it was established in 1991, the campus food bank was the first of its kind in the province. Now 51 other colleges and universities have followed its lead. The majority of the donations come from student groups and community bank events, including the annual Trick or Treat, where volunteers collect non-perishable items from neighbouring areas. This year netted 10,000 pounds of food, which Goebel says



Starving Students | Meaghan Goebel from the Student Food Bank puts together a hamper for a hungry University of Alberta student. PHOTO BY JOHN ULAN/EPIC PHOTOGRAPHY

will keep the shelves full ... for a while. The food hampers are free of charge and include items like canned beans, tuna, rolled oats, and dried pasta or rice. Perishable items are also given out, including one fresh fruit or vegetable, and eggs. Toiletries are also available.

“Aramark donates milk to the program,” Goebel says, “so we give our clients a token to pick up milk at the nearby residence.” A local bakery also donates bread, which is frozen and handed out with the hampers.

Students can use the service once every two weeks, which is more frequent than many other

campus food banks. Norquest College’s food bank, for example, only allows visits once per semester in emergency situations. At the University of Alberta, students go through a registration process and a 10-minute confidential interview with a food bank volunteer to assess the client’s need. “It’s more of a dialogue, and by no means exhaustive,” says Goebel. “But we do expect students to have concrete reasons for why they need our service.”

The campus food bank has a few strategies to meet the potentially large increases in need over the next year, including paying more attention

to what and how much they give out. “We are going to keep increasing awareness in the community, try to increase our grocery budget and continue to educate our volunteers,” Goebel says. “Our volunteers are ambassadors for the program, so that’s our best first step.”

The U of A also extends its services to NAIT and Concordia students, as those campuses don’t have established food banks. Goebel hasn’t seen many students from those schools using the campus food bank, but hopes they can increase awareness on those campuses as well.