



Caitlin Phare is the executive director of the campus food bank. She said the upcoming school year is shaping up to be one of their busiest yet. KEVIN TUONG/FOR METRO

Too hungry to study?

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Severe lack of security found among food bank users



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Almost half of the students who use the food bank at the University of Alberta are severely food insecure, meaning they've skipped meals or eaten less to get by.

The findings come from a new survey by Noreen Willows, an associate professor of community nutrition.

She set out to learn more about student users, and while she said it was no surprise 90 per cent were food insecure — they were using a food bank after all — the 45 per cent who were severely so were unexpected.

"(We expected) having trouble sometimes accessing enough food to eat, but to be consistently going without food?" she said. "That meant over the last month respondents had reduced food intake or disrupted food patterns — they were skipping meals, they were eating less. That's quite dramatic."

While the sample was small, only 58 students, and not random, Willows said the numbers are high enough to note. She points out that only about 12 per cent of the Canadian popu-

lation is food insecure, and a much smaller percentage of that is very insecure.

She also found that certain demographics were overrepresented, like Aboriginal and international students. One in five respondents have children.

The survey took place during the 2013-14 school year, during which the food bank got 73 requests for food hampers every month and served 1,176 people.

Since then numbers have only increased, according to food bank executive director Caitlin Phare. Last year they served 2,033 people, and so far this year they've helped 1,280, which puts them on track to surpass last year's numbers.

She's expecting the upcoming year, their 25th in operation, to be a busy one. It's part economy, she said, but the cost of being a student has also gone up.

"Rising living costs, rising tuition costs, rising textbook costs, there's definitely been a lot of movement around trying to make it more affordable but the cost of living is going up," she said.

She adds that students tend to only walk in the doors as a last resort, but wants them to know they're welcome to come before things get dire.

"We're here for when that paycheque didn't come in on time, or that week when you're at the end of the month and money is tight," she said. "We want to make sure that you have the supplies you need to do well."



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Caitlin Phare