

The Good Food Centre Hunger Report 2026



TMSU
TORONTO METROPOLITAN
STUDENTS' UNION



**The
Good Food
Centre**

yourtmsu.ca/food • [@yourtmsu](https://twitter.com/yourtmsu)

Abstract

This report collected data via a survey of students at Toronto Metropolitan University (n=894) conducted in Spring 2026. The survey results found that 48.5% of participants have experienced food insecurity during the past 12 months. It also reported that the vast majority of students believed that reliable access to food would improve their academic performance. The authors of this study conclude that immediate investment in campus food access alongside policy changes, including adjustments to TMU's strategic planning, structural reforms to the Ontario Student Assistance Program, and expanded student housing, will help address the root causes of food insecurity.

Land Acknowledgement

The land the Toronto Metropolitan Students' Union is on today is the traditional territory of many sovereign nations and peoples, including the Huron-Wendat, Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. Tkarón:to (often referred to as Toronto) is subject to the Dish with One Spoon treaty; we as people occupying this land are living within this treaty.

Tkarón:to continues to be home to many Indigenous peoples from across Turtle Island and we are grateful for the chance to live, work, and study on this land.

You can visit native-land.ca to find more information about the traditional territories on which you reside. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action are also available to read online at nctr.ca.

Suggested Citation

The Good Food Centre (2026). *2026 Hunger Report*. Toronto Metropolitan Students' Union. yourtmsu.ca/food/hunger-report

Credits

Written by Tate Weinstein

Editor & Supervisor Rob Howard

Editor & Graphic Designer Jay Ashdown

About Us

The Good Food Centre

The Good Food Centre (GFC) is the campus food bank at Toronto Metropolitan University, operated by the Toronto Metropolitan Students' Union. The GFC provides accessible grocery items, hygiene supplies, and occasional meals to all TMU students.

To access the GFC, learn how to register at yourtmsu.ca/food.

Toronto Metropolitan Students' Union

Toronto Metropolitan Students' Union (TMSU) represents over 38,000 full-time undergraduate students at Toronto Metropolitan University. As the central students' union on campus, TMSU works to build campus life, advocate for its members, organize campaigns and initiatives, provide cost-saving services, and work with students across the province and country for a more affordable and accessible post-secondary education system.

To access TMSU services and programs, visit yourtmsu.ca.

Executive Summary

Hunger is shaping student life at TMU.

Nearly half of the students who completed this survey **(48.5%)** experienced food insecurity during the past 12 months.

Food insecurity is more than missing meals. It affects students' ability to concentrate in class, complete assignments, participate in campus life and continue their education. When students cannot reliably afford food, the impact extends far beyond their grocery budget. It affects their health, mental well-being and academic success.

This report demonstrates that student hunger is not an individual problem, but a structural issue driven by rising living costs, unaffordable housing, limited income and inadequate student financial support.

While emergency food programs such as the Good Food Centre (GFC) play a vital role in supporting students, food banks alone cannot solve food insecurity. Research has consistently shown that emergency food programs are an important safety net, but cannot address the underlying economic conditions that cause hunger (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2012).

If Toronto Metropolitan University is committed to student success, food security must become part of the University's long-term strategy.

What We Found

- **48.5%** of surveyed students experienced food insecurity during the past 12 months.
- Students described regularly worrying about running out of food, skipping meals, eating less nutritious food and, in some cases, going an entire day without eating because they could not afford food.
- Food insecurity is affecting students' physical health, mental health and ability to succeed academically.
- Students with children face additional challenges, with many reporting that financial pressures are affecting the food available to their families.
- Employment is not enough to protect students from financial insecurity. Many students are working limited hours, while others cannot find work despite actively looking.
- Existing campus food programs provide essential support but are unable to meet the scale of student need.
- Students overwhelmingly believe that reliable access to food would improve their academic performance and support their ability to stay enrolled.

What Needs to Change

Student hunger cannot be solved through emergency food assistance alone. Long-term solutions require coordinated action from the University, government and community partners.

This report recommends immediate investment in campus food infrastructure alongside broader policy changes that address the root causes of food insecurity.

Immediate Priorities

- Launch a Campus Kitchen Hub.
- Expand access to culturally safe and appropriate food.
- Increase equity grants for students experiencing financial hardship.

Long-Term Priorities

- Embed food security and nutrition into TMU's strategic planning.
- Advocate for structural reforms to the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP).
- Expand affordable, university-managed student housing.

These recommendations are investments in student health, academic success and academic retention.

Every student deserves the opportunity to learn without worrying about where their next meal will come from.



Section 2

Methodology

Understanding the Student Experience

To better understand the realities of food insecurity at Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU), the Toronto Metropolitan Students' Union (TMSU) conducted a campus-wide survey over a one-month period. A total of **894 students** completed the survey, providing a strong snapshot of student experiences with food insecurity and financial stress.

How We Collected the Data

The survey was based on the **Household Food Security Survey Module (HFSSM)**, the nationally recognized tool used by **Health Canada** to measure household food in/security (Health Canada, 2020). Using this validated survey allows our findings on mild, moderate and severe food insecurity to be directly compared with national data.

Students were asked about their experiences over the previous 12 months, including:

- Household food security
- Monthly living expenses
- Academic experiences
- Changes to diet because of financial constraints

To encourage participation, students received a **Tony's Chocolonely chocolate**

bar upon proof of completion while supplies lasted.

Who Participated?

The survey gathered perspectives from across the TMU student community.

The sample included: **93.5%** undergraduate students; **4.5%** graduate students; and **2.0%** PhD, bridging, or certificate students.

Students from every major academic faculty participated (Fig. 1).

Understanding the Results

Like most surveys, there are some limitations to consider.

Students were asked to reflect on their experiences over the previous 12 months, which means some responses, particularly around monthly expenses, may rely on estimates rather than exact figures.

Because participation was voluntary and largely promoted nearby or at the Good Food Centre, students experiencing greater financial hardship may have been more likely to complete the survey. As a result, the findings may slightly overrepresent students facing financial insecurity.

The survey also provides a snapshot of one point in time and does not capture how financial pressures change throughout the academic year. Research shows that

food insecurity among post-secondary students often becomes more severe during predictable periods of financial stress. Many students face increased hardship around September and January, when tuition payments are due; and during examination periods, when heavy academic workloads can reduce their ability to work part-time (Brownfield et al., 2023; Meal Exchange Canada, 2021).

Academic Faculty	Representation (%)
Faculty of Community Services (FCS)	25.1
Ted Rogers School of Management (TRSM)	17.1
Faculty of Arts	14.9
The Creative School	13.1
Faculty of Science	11.0
Faculty of Engineering and Architectural Science (FEAS)	9.8

Figure 1



Section 3

Key Findings: What We Heard

The Hunger Report Survey revealed that many TMU students struggle to afford food. Food insecurity is not limited to a small group of students or instances of acute hardship. It exists on a spectrum, affecting students in different ways: from the stress of wondering if food will last until the next paycheck, to going entire days without eating.

Hunger Begins with Worry

For many students, food insecurity starts long before the cupboard is empty.

42.8% of students worried that their food would run out before they could afford to buy more. Of those surveyed:

9.8% said this was **often true**.

33.0% said this was **sometimes true**.

Living in downtown Toronto means many students face rising grocery prices while also paying high rent, transportation costs and tuition. The stress of trying to stretch a limited budget can also take an emotional toll, limiting students' capacity for academic work.

Eating Enough Doesn't Always Mean Eating Well

Nearly **39.5%** of students reported having enough food to eat but not always being able to buy the foods they preferred.

Many students described making difficult choices at the grocery store, replacing fresh

fruits, vegetables and proteins with less expensive, shelf-stable foods that are often high in sodium and lower in nutritional value. While these choices reduce buyers' immediate costs, they can have lasting consequences for their physical health and well-being.

Many students are eating less simply because they cannot afford enough food.

39.9% ate less than they felt they should because of financial constraints.

30.1% cut portion sizes or skipped meals over multiple months.

For many students, every dollar must be carefully allocated. Paying for rent or transit might cut into one's grocery budget. These trade-offs between transportation, housing, tuition and food are a common part of student life (Frank, 2018; Bessey et al., 2022).

Hunger is Becoming More Severe

For many students, food insecurity has progressed beyond worrying or skipping occasional meals.

32.2% experienced hunger but could not afford to eat.

22.6% experienced involuntary weight loss because they did not have enough food.

These findings mirror national research which shows that post-secondary students experience severe food insecurity at rates

significantly higher than the average Canadian household (Meal Exchange Canada, 2021).

Some Students are Going Entire Days Without Food

11.2% of surveyed students reported going an entire day without eating because they did not have enough money for food. Research from PROOF (2024) identifies this as a measure of extreme food insecurity, reflecting circumstances where existing safety nets have failed.

Financial Stress is Affecting Children's Nutrition

More than one-quarter (**25.1%**) of respondents live in households with dependent children under the age of 18. This includes student parents as well as students living with younger siblings or relatives.

Among households with children:

14.7% reported reducing the size of their children's meals.

30.3% reported being unable to afford a balanced variety of food for their children.

These findings help demonstrate the existing research which shows that rising housing costs, tuition, and everyday living expenses force student caregivers to make difficult decisions about feeding their families (Páez-Varas & Hammond, 2022).

Some participants reported their children's experiences of hunger.

14.7% reported that children in their

household were hungry because there was not enough money for food.

9.6% reported that their children had gone an entire day without eating.

Employment Is No Longer Enough

Among employed students:

23.4% worked fewer than 10 hours per week.

16.4% worked between 11 and 20 hours per week.

With often limited and unpredictable work schedules, many students are unable to earn enough income to cover tuition, rent, transportation, and food to study at TMU (Feed Ontario, 2025).

Many Students Cannot Find Work

At the same time, **38.3%** of students reported actively looking for work but being unable to find employment. An additional **7.5%** were unemployed but not seeking work (Fig. 2). Some students have reported that they cannot seek work due to their demanding academic schedules.

Together, this means **45.8%** of surveyed students had no employment income and were relying on savings, family support, loans, or other financial resources to meet their basic needs (Government of Canada, 2025; Trent University, 2026).

Campus food programs are making a meaningful difference for many students. However, the scale of need is much greater than the capacity of existing services.

Students are Not Accessing the Good Food Centre

Only **20.2%** of students reported using the Good Food Centre.

Survey responses and qualitative feedback suggest that many students are unaware the service exists, while others avoid accessing a food bank because of internalized stigma or concerns about being judged (Healthy Eating Research, 2025).

Programs that do not require students to register or identify themselves as needing assistance have greater participation rates.

40.7% regularly use programs such as TMU Eats or free soup days.

19.9% use these programs occasionally.

These findings suggest that universally accessible food programs help reduce stigma and make it easier for students to seek support.

Students See Food Security as an Academic Need

Students overwhelmingly expressed that reliable access to food would improve their university experience.

92.6% support expanding free on-campus food programs.

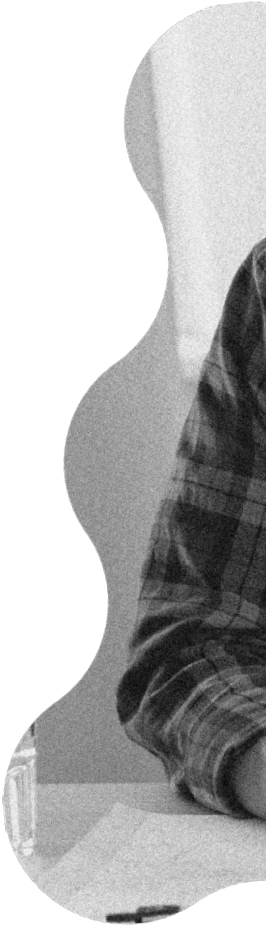
86.6% believe they would personally benefit from expanded food support.

89.1% believe reliable access to food would improve their academic performance, concentration, and ability to remain in school.

Students' Employment Status

Status	%
Employed Part-Time	38.8
Employed Full-Time	7.6
Self-Employed/Gig	4.0
On-Call/Casual	3.8
Unemployed & Seeking Employment	38.3
Unemployed & Not Seeking Work	7.5

Figure 2



Section 4

Equity & Student Experiences

Food insecurity does not affect all students equally

The experience of not having enough food is not distributed evenly across campus. Some students face a much higher risk because of the unique structural barriers they face on a regular basis.

Research on urban post-secondary campuses shows that food insecurity disproportionately affects specific groups, reinforcing existing inequalities in education, income, and health outcomes (Seko, Y. et al., 2026).

To respond meaningfully, campus supports must be designed with equity at the centre.

Participants who experienced the greatest proportion of food insecurity include:

- Racialized students
- 2-Spirit, trans and non-binary (2STNB+) students
- Disabled students
- Working-class students living independently from their families

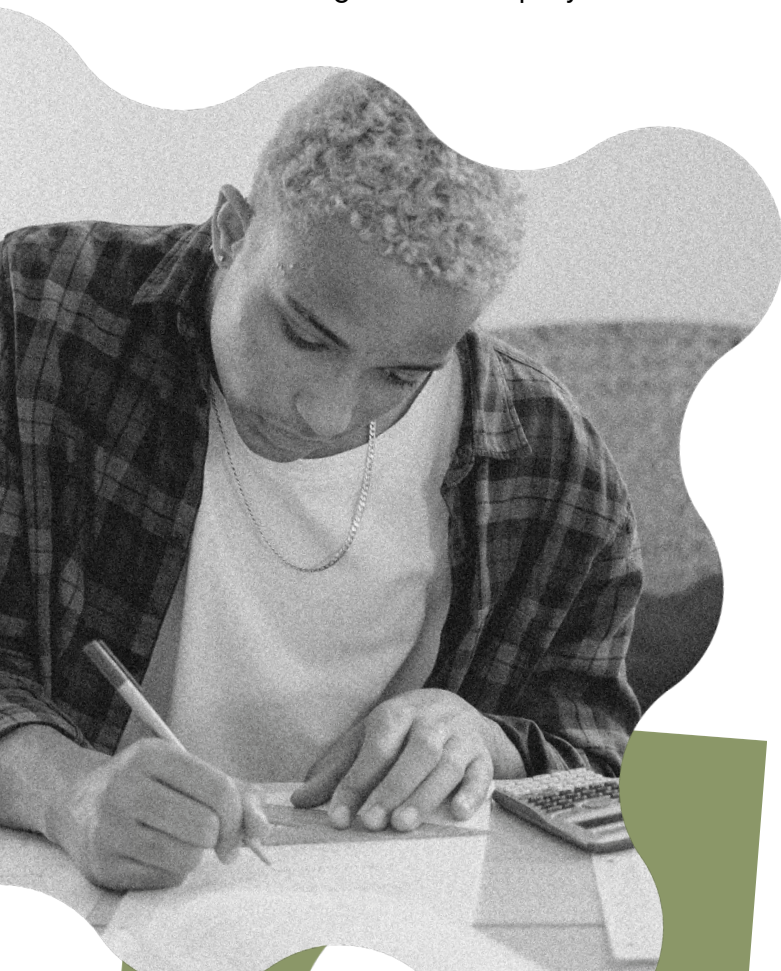
Racialized students face structural barriers beyond the classroom

Racialized students experience higher levels of food insecurity linked to employment discrimination and long-standing income inequality, including generational wealth gaps which limit access to financial support outside of school.

These pressures intensify academic demands and can increase the risk of experiencing chronic stress, burnout and other mental health challenges that could lead to interrupted studies or dropping out (University of Waterloo, 2025).

Gender-diverse students face compounded economic insecurity

2STNB+ students experience gender-based discrimination in housing and employment, making it harder to secure stable income and affordable living arrangements.



This also contributes to economic insecurity where access to food becomes unpredictable, thus intensifying academic demands.

This impacts 2STNB+ students' mental well-being, sense of safety, and connection to campus life. (Liss, 2026).

Disabled students face higher and more complex costs

Disabled students often experience discrimination on campus and face additional costs of living related to their medical needs, dietary requirements, and accessibility supports.

For disabled students, food insecurity can worsen chronic health conditions, increase barriers to academic participation and create additional stress.

Students living independently face constant financial pressure

Working-class students who do not live with or have financial support from their families are especially vulnerable to Toronto's high costs of living. These experiences are intensified by barriers like discrimination.

When students cannot reliably access food, these conditions undermine broader institutional goals toward improved equity, diversity, and inclusion on campus (University of Waterloo, 2025). These overlapping barriers make it difficult for students to remain in school and may lead to reduced course loads or withdrawal entirely (PROOF, 2024).

Priority areas for action

Accessible Equity Grants: The University must create straightforward financial support programs for racialized, disabled and gender-diverse students experiencing urgent financial need. These supports should be easy to access and designed to cover basic necessities like food and living expenses.

Culturally Safe Food Access: Donor funding should be used to expand food options that reflect student needs, including certified Halal foods (needed by **27.6%** of survey participants) and Kosher or other culturally appropriate options that are often missing from emergency food programs.

Allergen-Safe and Medical Food Options: Food support programs should include reliable access to gluten-free, dairy-free, and other allergen-safe foods. This ensures that students with chronic health conditions can safely rely on campus food services without risks to their health.

A Message to Students

You are not alone. If you are struggling to afford food, there is no shame in asking for help.

Living and studying in Toronto is expensive, and many students are facing the same challenges. The need for accessible food on campus exists because all students deserve to be supported while undergoing the stresses of university life.

Campus food programs, including the GFC, are confidential, safe and welcoming. They exist to support your health, dignity, and ability to succeed in your studies.

Recommendations

What Needs to Change

Students' reports of hunger highlight an urgent need for coordinated action from university and government administrations.

While philanthropic support plays an important role in strengthening services like the GFC, the responsibility cannot fall on charity alone. With recent provincial changes reducing OSAP's maximum grant proportion from 85% to 25% and shifting more costs onto student loans (CBC News, 2026), universities must step in to fill the gap. Students need simple, accessible, and timely financial support systems to more comprehensively respond to real-life emergencies.

Food insecurity at Toronto Metropolitan University is not a short-term challenge. It is a structural issue that requires a coordinated response across the University, the provincial government, and community partners.

Students have already told us what is needed. It is now up to our institutions to respond at the scale required.

Universities must invest in long-term food infrastructure

At the institutional level, TMU needs to move beyond temporary and emergency

responses and toward permanent infrastructure that can support consistent food access.

One of the most immediate and effective steps is the development of a shared commercial kitchen on campus. **This space would:**

- Centralize food preparation for campus meal programs
- Scale up the production and distribution of free meals
- Create a reliable system for receiving surplus food from community partners and local charities

This recommendation directly responds to the **92.6%** of students who support expanding free on-campus food programs and bridges the institutional gaps identified in recent research.

Food security is directly linked to academic success

Access to food is foundational to high academic performance.

While much of the existing literature on universal meal programs focuses on early education (Rooth & Alex-Petersen, 2021), key findings are consistent across the board: when students of all ages have reliable access to nutritious food, academic outcomes improve.

At TMU, **89.1%** of surveyed students said reliable access to food would directly improve their performance, focus, and ability to stay enrolled. Food security is therefore not only a matter of student nutrition, but also of academic retention and success.

Provincial policy must address income insecurity

At the provincial level, student food insecurity is closely tied to inadequate financial support.

Research from Feed Ontario (2025) and Food Banks Canada (2025) consistently shows that the two strongest drivers of food insecurity are insufficient income and high costs of living.

For students, this means that no amount of budgeting can fully compensate for structural gaps between income and expenses.

One of the most effective policy responses is increasing non-repayable student grants to reflect the real cost of living in urban centres like Toronto. Without this change, students will continue to face the financial barriers that lead directly to skipped meals and food insecurity.

Housing affordability is a food security issue

Food insecurity cannot be comprehensively addressed without addressing housing costs. When rent consumes a disproportionate share of income, food is often the first essential expense to be reduced. Students are regularly forced to choose between keeping a stable place to live and affording food (Daily Bread Food Bank, 2025)

Expanding access to affordable, university-supported housing is therefore a direct and necessary intervention to reduce campus hunger.

Strengthen and protect existing food supports

While universities cannot control broader food price inflation, they can reduce its impact on students through targeted supports.

TMU can help protect students from rising costs by:

- Expanding subsidized and low-cost meal programs
- Strengthening formal food recovery and donation partnerships
- Permanently funding existing supports such as Common Pot and the Good Food Centre

These programs are already essential parts of the campus safety net. Strengthening them ensures they can continue to meet rising demand and remain accessible to students experiencing food insecurity.

A shared responsibility

No single institution can solve food insecurity alone. But universities, governments, and community organizations each have a role to play.

Students are already carrying the weight of a nation-wide affordability crisis. The responsibility now lies with institutions to ensure that no student is forced to learn on an empty stomach.

Section 6

Conclusion

The findings of the Good Food Centre 2026 Hunger Report demonstrate a clear and urgent reality: food insecurity is part of everyday life for nearly half of TMU students.

For many students, missing meals or going without food is a direct result of rising living costs, unstable employment and incomes that do not keep pace with the costs of living in Toronto.

A call for long-term action

Campus food programs such as the Good Food Centre play an essential and valued role in supporting students. They provide immediate relief and help reduce harm in moments of crisis. However, these programs are not designed to carry the full weight of systemic hunger. The scale of need far exceeds what emergency-based supports alone can address. Food insecurity at TMU is not a temporary crisis, but a long-lasting structural issue.

If students are expected to succeed academically, they must first have their basic needs met. Without reliable access to food, students are forced to make impossible choices that affect their health, ability to concentrate, academic performance and ability to remain enrolled.

The evidence in this report shows us that incremental change is not enough.

Addressing student hunger requires TMU to treat food security as a core part of their academic success and retention strategy. This includes sustained investment in

campus food infrastructure alongside strong advocacy for provincial reforms in housing and financial aid.

No student should have to learn on an empty stomach. With coordinated action from the University and government partners, it is possible to build a campus where access to food is not uncertain or conditional, but a reliable foundation that supports every student's ability to learn, participate and succeed.



References

Bessey, M., Frank, L., & Williams, P. L. (2020). Starving to be a student: The experiences of food insecurity among undergraduate students in Nova Scotia, Canada. *Canadian Food Studies*, 7(1), 107–125.

Brownfield, N., Quinn, S., Bates, G., & Thielking, M. (2023). What is eating Gilbert's grades? Examining the impact of food insecurity and psychological distress on weighted average marks within a sample of Australian university students. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 47(5), 659–673.

Liss, M., Derflinger, T., & Wilson, L. (2024). Student Resources and Retention Among Transgender and Nonbinary College Students. *Diversity and Inclusion Research* 1(2).

CBC News. (2026, February 21). Fears Ontario's student aid program will bring huge debt, put higher education out of reach. [cbc.ca/news/canada/ont-osap-student-debt-9.7096406](https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ont-osap-student-debt-9.7096406)

Daily Bread Food Bank. (2025). *Who's Hungry 2025*. dailybread.ca/research-and-advocacy/research/whos-hungry-report

Feed Ontario. (2025). *Hunger Report 2025*. feedontario.ca/hunger-report-2025/

Government of Canada. (2025). Managing your budget as a student. *Financial Consumer Agency of Canada*. canada.ca/en/financial-consumer-agency/services/pay-down-student-debt.html

Health Canada. (2020, November 6). The household food security survey module (HFSSM).

Healthy Eating Research. (2025, December). How stigma impacts participant experiences with food security programs. healthyeatingresearch.org/2025/12/

how-stigma-impacts-participant-experiences-with-food-security-programs

Loopstra, R., & Tarasuk, V. (2012). The relationship between food banks and food insecurity among low-income Toronto families. *Canadian Public Policy*, 38(4), 497–512.

Lundborg, P., Rooth, D. O., & Alex-Petersen, J. (2021). Long-term effects of childhood nutrition: Evidence from a school lunch reform. *The Review of Economic Studies*, 89(2), 876–908. doi.org/10.1093/restud/rdab028

Meal Exchange. (2021). *2021 national student food insecurity report*. mealexchange.com/resources

Páez-Varas, K., & Hammond, C. (2022). Food insecurity on campus: A community-engaged case study with student-led families at the University of British Columbia. *Canadian Food Studies* 9(3), 103–123.

PROOF. (2024). Who are most at risk of household food insecurity? proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity/who-are-most-at-risk-of-household-food-insecurity

Seko, Y., Noack, A. (Andie), Mosey, C., et al. (2026). *TMU Campus Food Security Watch 2024*. Toronto Metropolitan University. doi.org/10.32920/31795600.v3

Trent University. (2026). Finance your Trent education: Resources for students. trentu.ca/studentfinances/financial-wellness/studentresources

University of Waterloo. (2025). Food insecurity and equity: Understanding the intersections. *Office of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Anti-Racism*.

