

Food choices and preferences of college students

Food has been an essential component of our life since we were born. Our daily eating habits and food preferences are shaped by types of food we have which results in a unique dietary profile. This report aims to analyze how individuals' food choices are determined. To gather relevant data, we obtained the data from the survey administered to 125 students of Mercyhurst University in order to do statistical analysis and gain insight. The data collected information on their food preferences, habits, childhood experiences, attitudes toward food and diet and other factors that may influence their food choices.

The survey collected personal and food-related questions in a total of 61 questions from 125 respondents. The data can be structured as 61 columns and 125 rows. While most respondents answered all the questions, some queries remained unanswered. Hence, we performed a data cleaning and analytics process based on the information we have to derive valuable insight. The most crucial task was data cleaning, which involved tasks such as converting NaN values to null, categorizing numerical data into specific categories such as grade points, and adding additional details by combining descriptions with answers (ex. 1 refers to everyday). This was done to ensure that the data was consistent, accurate, and suitable for analysis, allowing us to draw meaningful conclusions.

The report presents findings from a survey of 125 college students, 76 were female and 49 were male students, making up 60.8 percent and 39.2 percent of the sample, respectively. Of the total respondents, 51.6 percent reported being single, while 47.6 percent were in a relationship. The remaining 0.8 percent consisted of one married student and another who did not disclose their status. In terms of employment, we found that the majority of participants held a part-time job, accounting for 51.7 percent of participants, while 46.5 percent were unemployed. A small percentage, 1.7 percent, reported being in full-time employment, and 7.2 percent did not provide a response to this question. Regarding the income, 75.8 percent reported an income higher than \$50,001 which was found to be correlated with their academic performance. Specifically, 89 percent of the students had a grade point average higher than a B.

The analysis of the survey is divided into three parts. Firstly, the survey reveals insight into the cooking and eating habits of college students based on their living place. It shows that 78.2 percent of students live on campus

and barely cook. They typically eat out one to three times per week (51.6 percent) which implies that they may cook or order takeaway food for other days. Meanwhile, 12.9 percent of students who rent-off campus have a higher chance of cooking than those who live on campus and more than half of them dine out only one to two times in a week. Students who live with parents (7.2 percent) are a combination of those who live on and off-campus, with 1.6 percent of them having some occasion to cook. However, they also go to a restaurant around one to three days per week (4.8 percent). Considering all that was previously mentioned, it indicates that there might pose limitations on cooking, including a lack of personal kitchen space or a shared refrigerator with other residents.

Secondly, the survey provides insight into individuals' food preference based on the analysis of their childhoods. We observed that 60 percent of parents cooked on a daily basis, while 28.8 percent cooked two to three times per week. The most commonly eaten cuisine was American, accounting for 79.6 percent, followed by Mexican or Spanish food at 12 percent. However respondents' current favorite cuisine is Italian/French/Greek, Asian/Chinese/Thai/Nepal and Spanish/Mexican food with 47.2 percent, 17.6 percent and 12 percent, respectively. A deeper analysis of the data shows that 62.4 percent of people like ethnic food and the open ended question on their favorite childhood foods are pizza and pasta.

Lastly, we discovered patterns in relation to respondents' health behaviors. The survey mainly categorized their diets into four types: healthy (40 percent), unhealthy (48 percent) and eating the same thing repeatedly (8 percent) and unclear (4 percent). It shows that 59.4 percent of students are moderately concerned about the importance of consuming calories per day. Students who eat healthy food have the highest portion of those who care about calorie intake (9.6 percent). In contrast, people who eat unhealthy food have the highest percentage of people who consider calories unimportant (10.4 percent). Furthermore, with regard to the question on self-perception of weight, the majority of individuals who consumed healthy and unhealthy food perceived their weight to be within normal limits, while those who consumed a repetitive diet considered themselves to be physically fit. Regardless of diet pattern, the survey reveals 90.2 percent of them exercise regularly with 50.9 percent everyday and 39.3 percent two or three times per week.

In summary, the survey suggests a possible correlation between kitchen space and cooking habit, but does not necessarily indicate a decision to eat out. Next, the respondents' present cooking habits and food preferences do not necessarily align with parents' cooking routines and childhood food choices. Regardless of their dietary habits. However, half of the respondents expressed moderate concern about calorie intake, and 80 percent of the participants reported regular exercise habits.