



2024 UTAS Student and Staff Sustainability Survey Prevalence of Food Insecurity

July 2024

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The 2024 University of Tasmania Student and Staff Sustainability Surveys were open to all staff and students from 21 to 28 March 2024. The Sustainability Surveys included six food security questions. This is the third time that food security has been included as a focused section in the broader Student Sustainability Survey, the first in 2020 and second in 2022, and the second time for the Staff Sustainability Survey, the first in 2022. In this short report, these questions have been analysed and interpreted. The findings emphasise the urgency of the recently launched University of Tasmania Healthy, Sustainable, and Equitable Food Strategic Plan¹. Now more than ever this plan is crucial as we continue to monitor food insecurity trends and strengthen our commitment to provide more healthy, sustainable, and equitable food systems across all campuses, rooted in a rights-based approach.

What is food insecurity?

A person is food insecure when they lack regular access to enough safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life. This may be due to unavailability of food and/or lack of resources to obtain food. Food insecurity can be experienced at different levels of severity².

Using the USDA 6-item Household Food Security Short Form (6-item HFSSM), we can determine the severity of food insecurity faced by University of Tasmania students and staff (see form in Appendix 1). Based on the number of responses to this survey, we can ascertain both the prevalence and the severity of food insecurity among respondents.

Food Security

- **High food security:** no reported indications of food-access problems or limitations.

Food Insecurity

- **Marginal food security:** one or two reported indications over the past year—typically of anxiety over a shortage of food in the household and compromised food quality and variety.
- **Moderate security:** two to four reported indications over the past year— access to food is uncertain and may need to sacrifice other basic needs to be able to eat. The food most readily available or cheapest may be very poor quality with reduced variety and desirability.
- **Severe food insecurity:** five or six reported indications over the past year— have run out of food and gone entire days without eating or have likely experienced hunger.

Summary of finding of the 2024 Student and Staff Sustainability Surveys

- The prevalence of food insecurity among students has increased from two in five (42%) in 2022, to more than one in two (53%) students in 2024.
- There has been a substantial increase in severe food insecurity among students, which has risen from 17% in 2022 to 29% in 2024.
- The prevalence of food insecurity among staff has risen from 16% in 2022 to 22% in 2024.
- There has been an increase in moderate, and severe food insecurity among staff, which has risen from 6% in 2022 to 9% 2024 for moderate and from 7% 2022 to 9% in 2024 for severe food insecurity.

¹ UTAS 2023, [Healthy, Sustainable, and Equitable Food Strategic Plan 2023 2028](#)

² FAO 2024, Hunger [FAO 2024, Hunger and Food Insecurity](#)

Student food insecurity

The food security statistics among students from two discrete surveys conducted in 2022 and 2024 are depicted in Figure 1. Total food insecurity has increased from two in five in 2022, to one in two students in 2024. The proportion of students who are marginally and moderately food insecure has remained relatively stable. A substantial increase in severe food insecurity is noted among students, which has risen from 17% in 2022 to 29% in 2024.

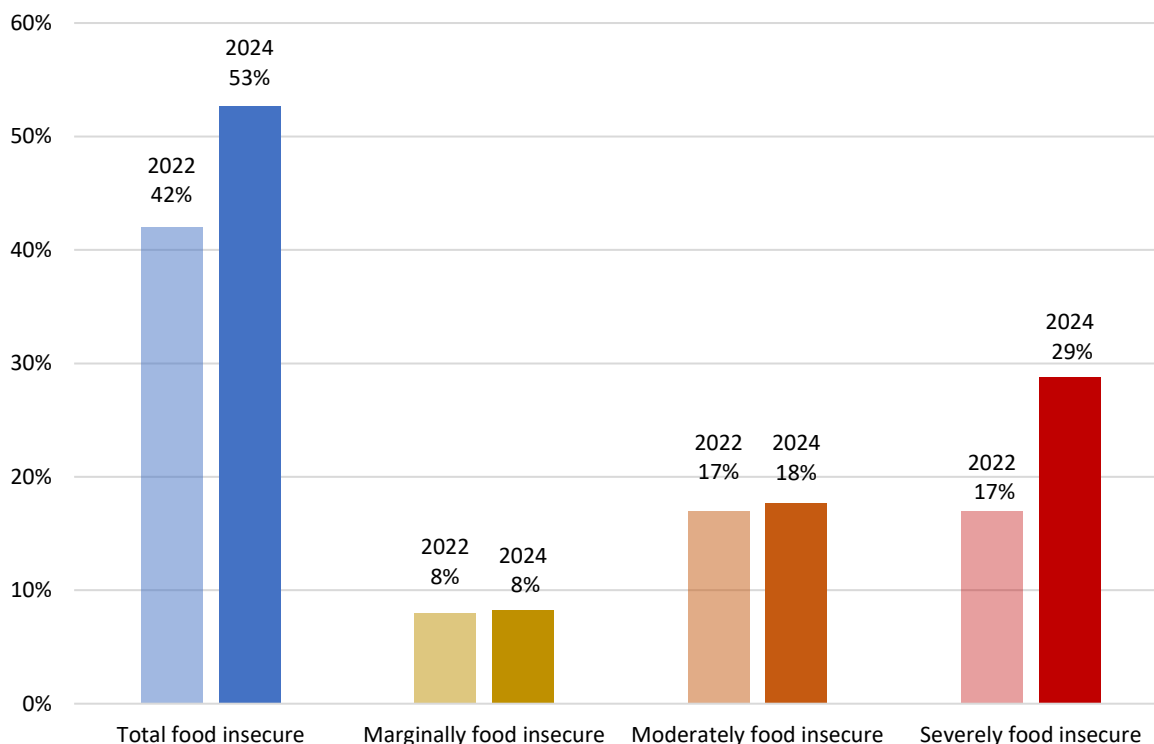


Figure 1: Prevalence and severity of food insecurity among student survey respondents in 2022 and 2024.

Table 1 shows the number and proportion of students experiencing marginal, moderate and severe food insecurity according to various demographic and education characteristics. Binary logistic regression was used to determine if the various demographic characteristics put **students at higher risk of food insecurity**³, finding:

- **Younger students** were at higher risk of food insecurity. In comparison to students aged 35-44, students aged 18-25 and 25-34 reported nearly 1.5 times increased odds of experiencing food insecurity.
- **Undergraduate (including Honours) students** were at significantly higher risk of food insecurity compared to postgraduate and pre-degree/short course students.
- **On campus students** were at two times increased risk of food insecurity compared to distance students.
- **International students** were at two times increased risk of food insecurity compared to domestic students.

All other demographic characteristics did not show significantly greater odds of students experiencing food insecurity.

³ Further information on the odds ratio calculations, using binary logistic regression, is available upon request.

Table 1 Demographic and education characteristic of the study sample, and proportion of each demographic experiencing marginal, moderate and severe food insecurity.

Characteristic		Total n (%)		Food security status			
				Total Food Insecure	Marginally Food Insecure	Moderately Food Insecure	Severely Food Insecure
Age in years (n=1594)	18 – 24	705	44.2%	58.7%	9.4%	19.3%	30.1%
	25 – 34	410	25.7%	59.5%	8.5%	19.5%	31.5%
	35 – 44	234	14.7%	50.0%	7.3%	17.9%	24.8%
	45 – 54	135	8.5%	34.1%	6.7%	11.1%	16.3%
	55 +	110	6.9%	20.0%	4.5%	9.1%	6.4%
Gender (n=1603)	Man or Male	449	28.0%	53.2%	8.5%	19.4%	25.4%
	Woman or Female	1089	68.0%	51.9%	8.3%	16.8%	26.8%
	Non-binary, self- identify or not disclosed	65	4.0%	63.1%	6.2%	20.0%	36.9%
Years of enrolment (n=1603)	First year	834	52.0%	53.1%	9.1%	16.1%	27.9%
	Second Year	322	20.1%	54.0%	6.8%	20.2%	27.0%
	Third year	211	13.2%	54.0%	7.6%	21.3%	25.1%
	Fourth year or longer	236	14.7%	48.3%	7.6%	16.5%	24.2%
Degree of enrolment (n=1577)	Pre-degree or short course	501	31.8%	48.5%	6.6%	14.8%	27.1%
	Undergraduate (inc. honours)	664	42.1%	57.7%	9.9%	18.7%	29.1%
	Postgraduate	412	26.1%	49.5%	7.8%	19.9%	21.8%
Mode of study (n=1603)	On campus	937	58.5%	60.5%	9.1%	20.4%	31.1%
	Distance	666	41.5%	41.7%	7.1%	13.8%	20.9%
Location of usual campus for on- campus students only (n=1033)	South	668	64.7%	60.5%	9.1%	19.8%	31.6%
	North	255	24.7%	57.3%	7.5%	22.7%	27.1%
	North-West	51	4.9%	62.7%	9.8%	21.6%	31.4%
	Sydney	39	3.8%	56.4%	10.3%	17.9%	28.2%
	Melbourne	9	.9%	66.7%	22.2%	-	44.4%
	Other	11	1.1%	45.5%	9.1%	9.1%	27.3%
Enrolment status (n=1603)	Domestic	1317	82.2%	50.6%	8.2%	17.0%	25.4%
	International	286	17.8%	62.2%	8.4%	20.6%	33.2%
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (n=1603)	Yes	101	6.3%	61.4%	7.9%	13.9%	39.6%
	No	1502	96.7%	52.1%	8.3%	17.9%	26.0%
Total sample (n=1603)				52.7%	8.2%	17.7%	26.8%

Staff food insecurity

The food security statistics among staff from the 2022 and 2024 surveys are depicted in Figure 2. The total food insecurity rate has risen from 16% in 2022 to 22% in 2024. The proportions of staff who are moderately, and severely food insecure have increased between 2022 and 2024.

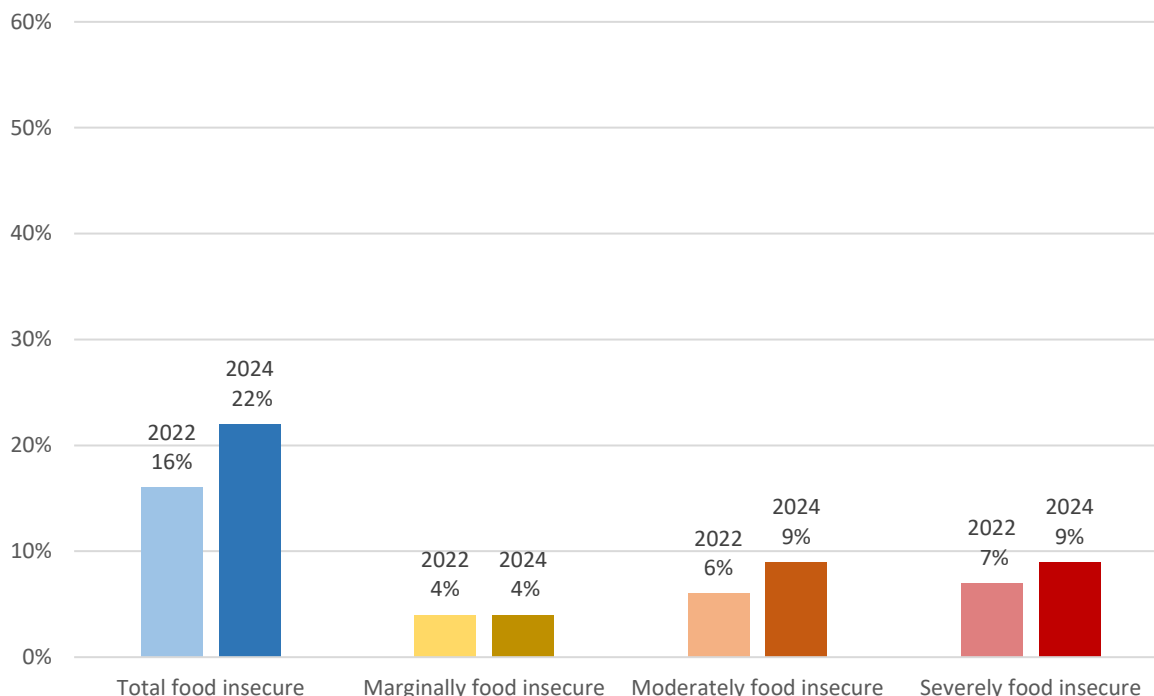


Figure 2: Prevalence and severity of food insecurity among staff survey respondents in 2022 and 2024

Figure 2 shows the number and proportion of staff experiencing marginal, moderate and severe food insecurity according to various demographic and employment characteristics. Binary logistic regression was used to determine if the various demographic characteristics put **staff at higher risk of food insecurity**⁴, finding:

- The age group of **18-34 years** was found to be at the highest risk of food insecurity, with a 4-fold increased likelihood compared to those aged 45-54.
- **Casual staff** were almost three times more likely to experience food insecurity compared to their tenured/permanent counterparts, while fixed-term contract staff were nearly twice as likely.
- In terms of employment duration, compared to those employed for 10 or more years, those **employed for less than 1 year or 1-3 years** had over three times the odds of experiencing food insecurity, and those employed for 4-10 years had twice the odds.

All other demographic and employment characteristics did not show significantly greater odds of staff experiencing food insecurity.

⁴ Further information on the odds ratio calculations, using binary logistic regression, is available upon request.

Short report of the 2024 UTAS Students and Staff Sustainability Survey's food security questions

Table 2 Demographic and employment characteristic of the study sample of staff, and proportion of each demographic experiencing marginal, moderate and severe food insecurity.

Characteristic				Food security status			
		Total n	%	Total Food Insecure	Marginally Food Insecure	Moderately Food Insecure	Severely Food Insecure
Age in years (n=565)	18-34	85	15.0	44.7%	8.2%	15.3%	21.2%
	35-44	170	30.1	24.1%	4.7%	10.0%	9.4%
	45-54	183	32.4	17.5%	2.7%	8.2%	6.6%
	55-64	106	18.8	12.3%	1.9%	5.7%	4.7%
	65+	21	3.7	4.8%	4.8%	-	-
Gender (n=586)	Man, or Male	215	36.8%	22.8%	4.7%	7.4%	10.7%
	Woman or Female	343	58.6%	21.0%	3.8%	9.6%	7.6%
	Non-binary, self-identify or prefer not to disclose	27	4.6%	33.3%	-	14.8%	18.5%
Type of role (n=586)	Academic	178	30.4%	17.4%	2.8%	5.6%	9.0%
	Academic and professional	21	3.6%	28.6%	9.5%	9.5%	9.5%
	Professional	387	66.0%	24.0%	4.1%	10.6%	9.3%
Employment contract (n=556)	Adjunct / Honorary	13	2.2%	15.4%	7.7%	-	7.7%
	Casual	28	4.8%	39.3%	-	17.9%	21.4%
	Fixed-term contract	122	20.9%	28.7%	9.0%	9.0%	10.7%
	Tenured/Permanent	422	72.0%	19.4%	2.6%	8.8%	8.1%
Location of usual campus (n=586)	North (e.g., Launceston, Newnham, Beauty Point)	143	24.4	22.4%	4.2%	10.5%	7.7%
	North-West (e.g., Burnie, Elliot, Forthside)	21	3.6	23.8%	-	4.8%	19.0%
	Other (i.e. Melbourne, other)	11	1.9	9.1%	-	9.1%	-
	South (e.g., Hobart, Sandy Bay, Tarroona)	396	67.7	21.5%	4.0%	8.1%	9.3%
	Sydney (e.g. Rozelle)	12	2.1	50.0%	8.3%	25.0%	16.7%
Length of employment (n=586)	less than 1 year	48	8.2	33.3%	6.3%	10.4%	16.7%
	1-3 years	125	21.4	32.8%	4.8%	16.0%	12.0%
	4-10 years	183	31.4	23.5%	4.4%	7.7%	11.5%
	10y+	227	38.9	12.8%	2.6%	6.2%	4.0%
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (n=571)	Yes	8	1.4	21.7%	4.1%	8.7%	8.9%
	No	563	96.2	62.5%	-	25.0%	37.5%
Total sample (n=586)				22.2%	3.9%	9.0%	9.2%

Recommendations

Overall, these statistics indicate a worsening food security situation for both staff and students at the University between 2022 and 2024, with particularly worrying increases in severe food insecurity. The results of this survey should be considered in the context of the food insecurity situation in Tasmania as a whole. To put this into perspective, the most recent data from 2022 indicates that the prevalence of food insecurity among Tasmanians was 1 in 2 (51%), primarily driven by the rising cost of living⁵. This comparison emphasizes the severity of the situation within both the University and broader community, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to address these challenges.

The significant rise in food insecurity among university students and staff from 2022 to 2024 highlights the urgent need to rapidly build on current activities and implement many new ones. The University's Healthy, Sustainable, and Equitable Food Strategic Plan 2023-2028⁶ seeks to achieve just that with efforts prioritised to uphold everyone's right to healthy food. Among a broad range of actions outlined in the nine priority areas of the plan, some of our initiatives include:

1. **Expand Food Support Services:**

- Accelerate the expansion of on-campus food hubs beyond the current Sandy Bay campus hub to include the north, northwest and Rozelle campuses, ensuring immediate food relief across all University of Tasmania campuses.
- Continue Student Living and Student Equity and Success supported activities (e.g., breakfast clubs, cooking classes, Sunday brunches and community lunches).

2. **Expand Edible Campus activities:** Expand growing and distribution in response to increased need of food support services.

2. **Partnerships and collaboration:** Strengthen collaborations with local farmers, food cooperatives, and social enterprises to build a sustainable food sourcing model that supports local economies and minimises our carbon footprint.

3. **Enhance Awareness and Accessibility:** Improve communication about available food security resources and simplify the process for accessing these services.

4. **Community-centric solutions:** Establish participatory forums where students and staff are directly involved in decision-making and implementation of food programs, including community gardens, campus kitchens and food hubs.

5. **Increase in Education:**

- Fund a free online food Education Program to support online students and the Tasmanian Community
- Offer scholarships and support for students studying Health and Nutrition to grow food literacy in the Tasmania community.

This approach not only addresses immediate food security needs but also lays the groundwork for lasting systemic change.

⁵ The Tasmania Project, 2022 [“Quality food is too expensive to afford”: 1 in 2 Tasmanians are food insecure in 2022 due to the rising cost of living. UTAS](#)

⁶ UTAS 2023, [Healthy, Sustainable, and Equitable Food Strategic Plan 2023 - 2028](#)

Appendix 1

The validated food security questions included in the UTAS Student and Staff Sustainability Survey using the USDA 6-item Household Food Security Short Form (6-item HFSSM)⁷

Please answer the following food access questions in relation to THE PAST 12 MONTHS

1. In the last 12 months was there any time you have run out of food and not been able to purchase more?

- a) Don't Know
- b) Never
- c) In only 1 or 2 months
- d) Some months but not every month
- e) Almost every month

2. In the last 12 months was there a time you couldn't afford to eat balanced meals?

- a) Don't Know
- b) Never
- c) In only 1 or 2 months
- d) Some months but not every month
- e) Almost every month

3. In the last 12 months, did you ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food? Yes or no.

4. IF YES ABOVE, ASK How often did this happen?

- a) Don't Know
- b) In only 1 or 2 months
- c) Some months but not every month
- d) Almost every month

5. In the last 12 months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?

- a) Don't Know
- b) Never
- c) In only 1 or 2 months
- d) Some months but not every month
- e) Almost every month

6. In the last 12 months, were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?

- a) Don't Know
- b) Never
- c) In only 1 or 2 months
- d) Some months but not every month
- e) Almost every month

⁷ USDA, 2012, U.S Household [Six-item Short Form Food Security Survey Module](#)