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**EXPLORING THE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE EATING
BEHAVIOUR AMONG POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN A
PUBLIC UNIVERSITY: A FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION**

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Introduction

This study would be establishing the different facts that can influence the different eating behaviours and how the postgraduate students have established their eating habits. The students tend to face different challenges as well as different feelings while studying at the University, and this can influence their concentration levels as well as competencies, and these tendencies of changing food habits tend to change from person to person as well as depends upon the diversity within the public university. Various previous studies have established the fact that eating habits are influenced by a variety of individual social, as well as environmental factors. It is necessary for the students to provide a necessary and healthy diet and helps to prevent numerous health problems (Kabir *et al.*, 2018). A proper understanding of the different food habits of the postgraduate students within the public university has been regarded to be one of the critical factors that can ensure the process of healthiness and thus further can influence the choices of food by the individuals and can influence the overall decision-making process. It has been observed that people tend to exhibit a certain eating pattern within urban settings and minimally processed food is less on a considerable basis (Chen and Antonelli, 2020). This study with a focus group of postgraduate students is somewhat at the end of their academic choices and study about their eating behaviours have been some of the important factors that can promote healthier and sustainable dietary patterns. The research can have significant scope in the future. This research primarily studies the ways the eating behaviours of postgraduate students are identified. Hence with this data, future researchers can easily provide solutions in order to assess the non-beneficial dietary patterns and can provide solutions to maintain the health of the individuals while studying to enhance their performance in studies.

In order to understand the factors influencing eating behaviours proper research is to understand the rationale and objectives that have been put forward along with the different research methodologies and designs. Further, sampling and materials of data collection and a focus group study including the analysis of data through interview questions would be conducted within the research.

Rationale & Research Question/Aims/hypothesis

The research finds its rationale due to the fact that postgraduate students are needed to maintain optimum mental steadiness and provide performances in order to be successful and with this, the performance of the students can vary. Hence a proper guide to nutrition. Eating behaviours can improve healthcare services and can contribute to the process of responding to the disordered eating process and can manage different health conditions. Furthermore, understanding eating behaviours can point to various health implications such as morbidity and relative obesity that can come up with issues such as quality of life and can provide insights on the directionality of the relationships between eating behaviour and health issues. It can be stated that after the pandemic, healthy eating behaviours, as well as mental health, can create some massive nuances in health and well-being, hence understanding the factors influencing the eating behaviours are needed to be studied to assess the dietary and health needs of the students (Whatnall, 2022).

The primary aim of the study is to explore the different factors that can influence the different eating behaviours of postgraduate students within a public University.

The objectives are as follows:

- To explore the different factors of eating behaviours among postgraduate students within the University of Wales Trinity Saint David

The Research question that the research would be addressing is

RQ: What is the current scenario that can relate to the eating behaviour among the postgraduate students in the postgraduate program within a public college?

Research Methodology (Research methods)

The primary methodology that has been followed is a philosophy. The positivist philosophy has been regarded to be viable for this research, this positivist research has been influential and makes the research based on the findings rather than the researcher's bias, and the interview with the focus group makes the research completely rely on the scientific philosophy. This follows through the process of inductive research as the inductive research depends upon the process of moving specific to empirical suggestions (Kim, 2021), the inductive research has been applied through data collection, where the interviews are conducted to gain first-hand collection of information and the questions move from particular to general. The qualitative strategy has been chosen for

the research as the interviews are aimed to primarily establish descriptive answers expressing the feelings of the students regarding their eating behaviours during their post-graduation study.

Research Design

As this study uses a descriptive research design, the study would be disregarding any causal or hypothesis in the creation of a distribution channel between the different variables of interest (Aggarwal and Ranganathan, 2019). As it is an equivalence primary study, the descriptive study can help to generate the interrelationship between the variables. As well as describe the different characteristics of the different students from different backgrounds and can gather data through an observational study. The descriptive study to analyse the interview results created different factors to understand the eating habits of the students within a particular public university.

Recruitment, Sampling & Study Participants

A process of random sampling has been opted for the research has been chosen, the participants for the research have been chosen randomly from the university to assess their eating behaviours, random sampling has been chosen because every student within the university cannot be chosen and if done, it might cause the research to be huge and might cause problems of parity.

Materials/Data Collection Method(s)/procedure

The research is based on primary data collection. This primary data collection is based on qualitative data collection and regards the feelings and emotions of the participants regarding their eating behaviours and it has been evident as an interview would be formulated to understand the eating behaviours of the participants (Taherdoost, 2021). The primary datasets are the datasets that are collected first-hand and can undertake different experiments via the process of direct communication as well, which in this case is the interview with the postgraduate students (Mazhar *et al.*, 2021).

Data analysis technique

The primary data that are collected from the interviews would be transformed into themes. The themes represent the trends or similarities in information that can be observed from the interviewee regarding the food patterns, these themes then can be evaluated in order to meet the research questions as well as the objectives of the research. Further, this thematic analysis when employed can analyse these complex datasets and can provide some of the trustworthy findings as well in order to establish the eating behaviours within the students (Dawadi, 2020).

Ethical Considerations

In terms of the purpose of collecting information from the participants, informed consent has been provided to the students of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David before conducting the interview. Here, the approach of the researcher in obtaining informed consent has been prominent with the offering of mail to each of the participants and also by asking them to fill the informed consent form. Here the researcher also has ensured that the participants are accepting the terms and conditions of the research purpose and also participate it according to their willingness. Thus, with the acceptance of the participants, the informed consents have been considered to move forward with the research method. Moreover, the approach of ensuring that all the information was confidential and the participants attended it according to their willingness also has been considered here at the time of performing the research and also in gaining informed consent.

Results

1. What influences your food choices?

The approach of the Interviewer in asking this question to the 3 participants indicates the need of knowing the factors which influence the food choices of the individuals.

Participant 1 has addressed the history of glaucoma and diabetes in her family, this has influenced the individual to take out carbs and sugar from her food items. This also has helped the individual to reduce body weight from 90-70.

Participant 2 has addressed that due to cholesterol, eating fruit and healthy items have influenced food choice.

Participant 3 indicates the need for consuming tasty and healthy food as the influential factor in making food choices.

2. Would you participate in a university meal program? Why or why not?

Participant 1 against the question answers that she will not be attending any university meal program as she cooks her own food which is different from others and she also does not use certain oil or spices that the meal program uses.

Participant 2 indicates that the possibility of facing health issues from certain food is something that keeps him away from eating from the meal programs.

Participant 3 addresses the condition of not consuming any outside food due to health issues like cholesterol.

3. When you think about eating healthy, what kind of foods do you think about? Which are available at your university? What is missing that you wish were available?

Participant 1 answered that she has not found any food items at university which is healthy for and she prefers bringing her packed lunch to go for healthy choices and also wishes that healthy food choices are available at the university.

Participant 2 shared that most of the vending machines at the university are having sweet and sugary drinks based on which he prefers to bring his drinks and food for lunch.

Participant 3 addresses the condition of seeing some apples, sugar-free drinks, nuggets, and bananas or salads as food items at the university that the person would think about consuming as a healthy food choice.

4. How often do you make these healthy choices when they are/or would be available in your University?

Participant 1 has shared to make healthy choices very often

Participant 2 has indicated making healthy choices very often as the person follows a very strict diet plan.

Participant 3 addresses the need of following healthy choices not very often because no such healthy food choices are available at the university.

5. What foods do you consider less healthy in your university's vending machines/cafeteria? Why do you think they are less healthy?

Participant 1 stated that drinks that are high in sugar along with chocolates are unhealthy food items as university vending machines.

Participant 2 indicates food that is made with much oil and spices as the less healthy food.

Participant 3 addresses different types of coffee and drinks as the unhealthy food that university vending machines provide.

6. How often do you make less healthy choices when they are available in your university vending machines/cafeteria?

Participant 1 has indicated to not make any unhealthy choices when they are available in the university vending machine or the cafeteria.

Participant 2 has answered to also not make unhealthy choices very often.

Participant 3 indicates making less healthy choices sometimes

7. What university food changes in the past year do you like? What changes don't you like?

Participant 1 has shared seeing no changes

Participant 2 indicates seeing changes based on the addition of vending machines

Participant 3 stated the edition of non-vegetarian food

8. Have your eating habits changed at university since last fall? In what ways have they changed?

Participant 1 has said that it has not changed due to the urge of eating healthy food.

Participant 2 stated that eating habit has changed due to the presence of unhealthy food items

Participant 3 indicates a changing eating habit due to the lack of healthy food items presented at the university.

9. What time do you go to lunch? What time would you prefer to take your lunch?

Participant 1 has stated to eat lunch at 1 PM

Participant 2 indicates eating Lunch at 2 PM

Participant 3 addressed eating lunch at 3 PM

10. Do you feel like you have enough time to finish your food during lunch? Do you feel like you spend too much time standing in lines to prepare your food?

Participant 1 shared to not have enough time to finish food during lunch as she thinks she spends too much time standing in lines to prepare food.

Participant 2 indicates having enough time as the food items are readily available at the university.

Participant 3 stated not having enough time.

11. How many times a day do you use the vending machines? Where is the vending machine located? Does the location influence how often you use it?

Participant 1 has indicates that she does not use the vending machine

Participant 2 indicates using 1-2 times a day if it is at his area or range or accessibility

Participant 3 has stated to not use vending machine as it is located only in the cafeteria

12. Where do you get your nutrition information from?

Participant 1 indicates getting nutritional information from the internet.

Participant 2 stipulates obtaining information from nutritionists

Participant 3 indicates gaining information from Google

13. What kinds of information do you need to make healthy food choices?

Participant 1 addresses information like nutritional values and components presented in the food items.

Participant 2 indicates having a proper chart of diet that will have all the required information on nutrition and benefits that every food item will offer.

Participant 3 also addresses the usage of the Internet and Google.

14. Would the availability of information in the kitchen area/ cafeteria influence your food choices?

Participant 1 has shared that if any nutritional information is presented in a poster, the person sees it which influences her food choices.

Participant 2 stipulates the visibility of information related to allergies and eye-catching information as the influential factor in making food choices.

Participant 3 indicates the presence of the canteen and availability of information about every food item as an influence to make food choices.

15. What can your university do to promote healthy eating?

Participant 1 indicates having a cafeteria with hot items

Participant 2 addresses the need of presenting many food choices starting from European to Indian which will be less spicy.

Participant 3 indicates adding rice as a food item to promote healthy eating.

Theme 1: Factors influencing eating behaviour of postgraduate students at the University

According to the representation of the result of the interview, the theme has been developed here with the purpose of representing the factors that have influenced the healthy eating behaviour of postgraduate students at University of Wales Trinity Saint David. Representation of quotes or dialogues of students from the interview indicates that their university has been failing to add

healthy food items and eating choices for the students as most of the food items offered in vending machines and cafeterias are unhealthy and developed with spices, sugar, and oil (Voinea *et al.*, 2019). On the other hand, students also have shared that the need of maintaining cholesterol, high body weight and a healthy lifestyle is something that they prefer the most rather than eating from a university meal program which provides unhealthy food items.

Theme 2: Perspective of healthy and unhealthy eating aspects of postgraduate students at the University

The development of the theme essentially indicates the perspective that postgraduate students have developed with healthy and unhealthy eating aspects. According to some students, they sometimes and very often prefer to eat unhealthy fast food but other students have stated that they only eat healthy food and do not prefer eating university-provided food as they are not healthy (Alakaam *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, due to a lack of information related to the nutritional value of food items in universities and the need of the student to consume healthy food like apples, milk, drinks with less sugar, vegetables, salad, and chicken, the perspective of the students are different and essentially focused towards eating healthy food which is better for their health and wellbeing.

Theme 3: Improvement of healthy food offerings in universities represented by students

The last theme represents the viewpoint of the students related to the way public universities can improve their healthy food offerings according to the suggestions of the students. Each of the students has shared that to follow healthy eating habits, it is essential for universities to open a cafeteria that serves healthy vegetarian along with non-vegetarian foods made with less oil and has healthy components in them (Reuter *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, the approach of developing vending machines offering coconut drinks and other healthy juice and fruits can also be an improvement.

Discussion

The overall result from the interview has represented the knowledge that when it comes to knowing eating habits different postgraduate students have different urges, needs, and factors like healthy living style, reduction of body weight, cholesterol, and also the aspect of improving mood and behaviour related to their food item choices. Knowledge shared by Abraham *et al.*, (2018) indicates the factor the students to live a better life and ensure that eating junk and fast food is not causing them to face any illness or health issues which can affect their educational activity, they prefer eating healthy and staying healthy the most. The need of meeting expectations related to the

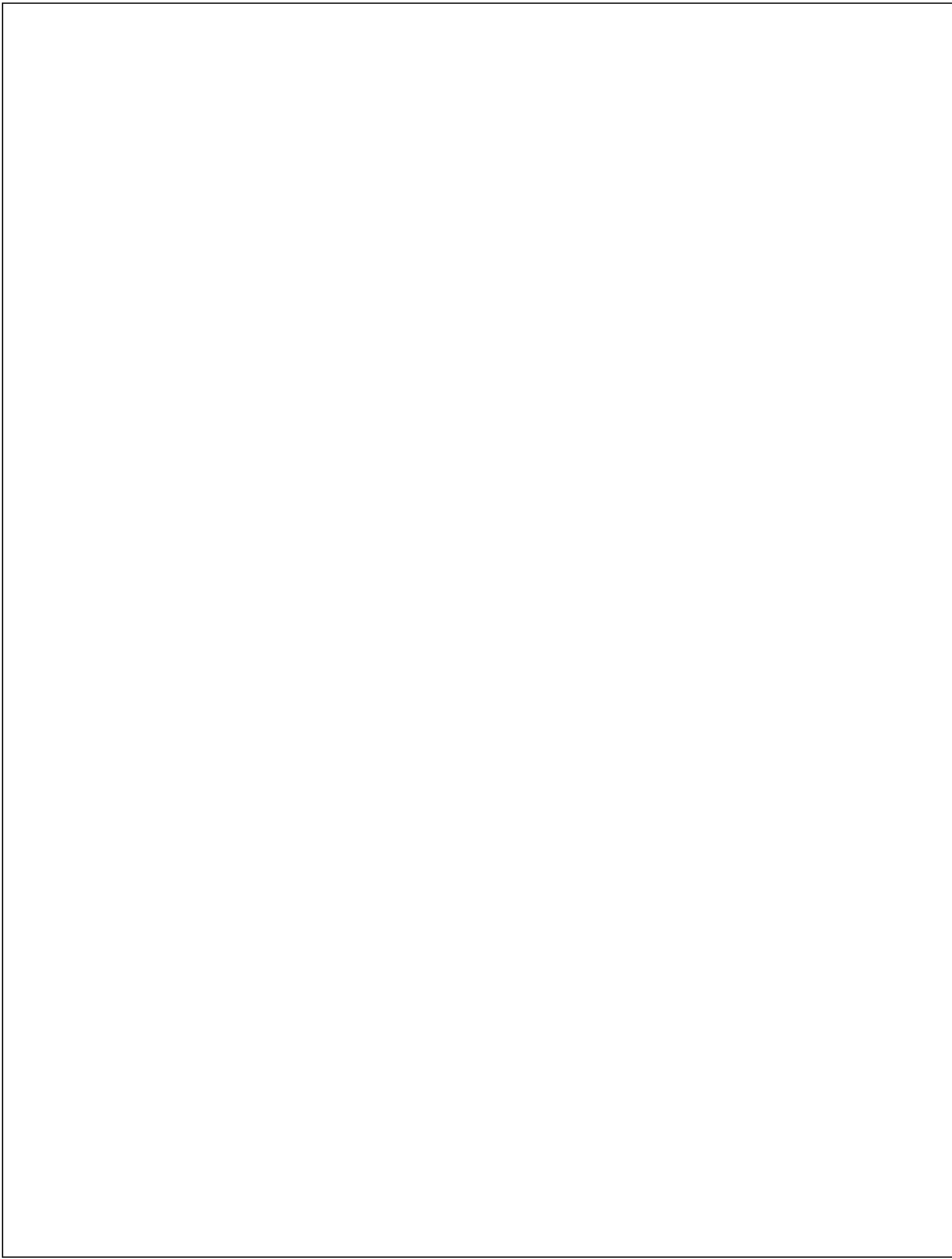
eating behaviour of postgraduate students, the result has ensured justifying it by representing a healthy eating choice of students. An alternative explanation of the finding indicates the different aspects of the students eating unhealthy food along with spicy and junk food which is related to their changing moods, feelings, and emotions. As mentioned in previous research papers addressed by Sogari *et al.*, (2018) also indicates that there are several factors which change the eating behaviour of students in a different manner. This also has been possible to generate here with the evaluation of the research result as many students have shared that they consider changing their eating habits according to their needs and expectations of following a healthy habit or managing their mood and emotions. Based on this, the result has represented that with the influential factors and with the changing eating behaviour and habit, the condition of living a healthy life and eating habit is also changeable and it essentially occurs among postgraduate students the most.

Conclusion

In order to answer the research questions, factors like eating habits, mood, feelings, emotional motivation and also the accessibility of healthy and unhealthy habits are the primary component which influences the eating habit and behaviour of postgraduate students. Based on this, the approach of collecting data through conducting focus group interviews has been effective here to generate a more logical along with relevant set of information regarding the research question. Considering this, the recommendation for practice that can be considered here indicates the need for different public and private universities in following the approach of offering healthy food items to students. In terms of limitation, the overall research is limited with the aspect of collecting survey-based data and information in which the researcher was required to develop close-ended questions to obtain more logical, thorough, in-depth and specific information and knowledge. Due to the limitation of time and money, the researcher has faced the limitation of collecting primary data conducted through survey which also has reduced the quality and reliability of the information collected and analysed here. Moreover, the creation of future studies based on different kinds of demographics and identifying different eating habits of that individual can be a future scope of the research.

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Appendix – A blank copy of your questionnaire

What influences your food choices?

Would you participate in a university meal program? Why or why not?

When you think about eating healthy, what kind of foods do you think about? Which are available at your university? What is missing that you wish were available?

How often do you make these healthy choices when they are/or would be available in your University?

What foods do you consider less healthy in your university's vending machines/cafeteria? Why do you think they are less healthy?

How often do you make less healthy choices when they are available in your university vending machines/cafeteria?

What university food changes in the past year do you like? What changes don't you like?

Have your eating habits changed at university since last fall? In what ways have they changed?

What time do you go to lunch? What time would you prefer to take your lunch?

Do you feel like you have enough time to finish your food during lunch? Do you feel like you spend too much time standing in lines to prepare your food?

How many times a day do you use the vending machines? Where is the vending machine located?

Does the location influence how often you use it?

Where do you get your nutrition information from?

What kinds of information do you need to make healthy food choices?

Would the availability of information in the kitchen area/ cafeteria influence your food choices?

What can your university do to promote healthy eating?