



UTERN's Good Food Box Initiative April 2020

A UTERN Support Initiative for U of T Students Facing Food Insecurity during COVID-19

Introduction

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, UTERN decided to start an initiative to support University of Toronto students who face food insecurity. Especially with a significant amount of unspent funds due to student events being cancelled and no longer requiring funding from UTERN, the executive wanted to put the funds back into the student body.

This was inline with our mandate which includes:

- Providing resources and ongoing support for marginalized and Indigenous groups at UofT while going beyond simple themes of reconciliation and fundamentally promoting decolonization at UofT

As well as a general recognition that food insecurity is a large aspect of the environmental issues that we have today, which is further exacerbated by this pandemic.

Details

The initiative ran from **March 29th to April 25th**. The team met for a total of 3 meetings. Our initiative had a goal of using up to \$7000 dollars to purchase giftcards that could be used to redeem one small produce box from FoodShare Toronto that would feed one to two people for a week. The UTERN team would be responsible for receiving requests and sending out giftcard codes to individuals, while FoodShare would handle the logistics of delivering the boxes to students. We communicated with FoodShare as this was the easiest way of organizing the initiative due to both our team's and FoodShare's capacity.

Who was Involved?

5 members of the 2019-2020 executive: Yi Fan (President), Raymond (UTSC Representative), Ana (External Executive Liaison), Samantha (Secretary), and Denelle (Outreach), formed the team that organized the initiative and designed the process, strategized the outreach, and actively participated in the operations of the initiative. While each member contributed to every single part of the process, we also leveraged the existing responsibilities and roles that currently exist within the team.

Outreach

The initiative started with a pilot process in the first week whereby we restricted our outreach to prioritized channels such as the Equity Students Union, the Indigenous Students Association, College Directors, Caribbean Studies Association, the Environmental Working Group Network, etc. This was in order to prioritize marginalized communities as we conducted a trial run of our system. We scaled up outreach and reached out more broadly and across various U of T institutions as well as a broader U of T social media campaign in the following weeks. We



communicated the initiative via email, Facebook messaging, Instagram posts, and personal connections as our main outreach formats.

Process

Our process for the initiative consisted of a google form whereby students would put in contact information and confirm necessary details to ensure that the FoodShare boxes could be delivered to them. We asked for U of T emails to ensure that only U of T students could apply, as well as demographic questions about year level and campus affiliation. In addition, we stipulated the requirements for receiving the food box such as the student being able to receive it at an address within FoodShare’s delivery zone as well as the ability to use the giftcard code within the week.

At the next stage, we emailed all the students who filled in the google form with an initial confirmation email where we asked them to confirm that they were still interested. Once we received their confirmation, we would send them the code to redeem a Good Food Box on FoodShare’s website. We decided to purchase giftcard codes from the FoodShare website and sent the codes to students as this minimized the amount of confidential information about addresses and contact information that we would have access to, leaving FoodShare with the logistics of organizing the delivery to each individual.

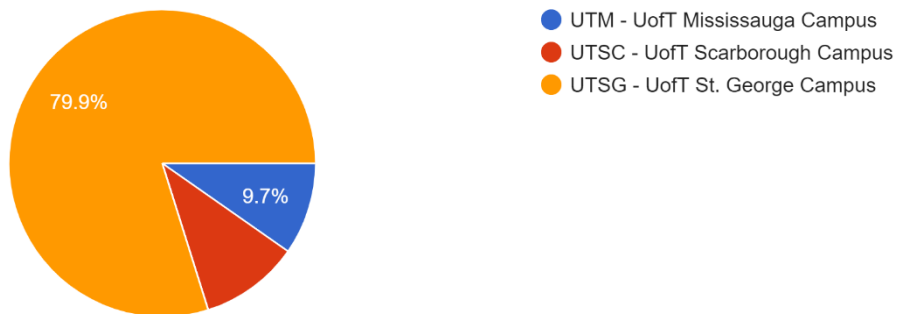
During this process, we consciously decided to exclude any requirements for income or living situations from the form as we felt strongly that students should not have to prove their need to us and that all students deserve to access fresh produce during this pandemic. However, due to resources and capacity, we were also limited to only providing one good food box to each student for the whole initiative despite individuals’ circumstances.

Reach

We received **a total of 814 responses** to the form. The majority of students who requested a good food box were from the U of T St. George Campus. A main limitation to the Good Food Box Initiative is that the delivery zone of FoodShare did not cover most of Mississauga, thus limiting UTM students from being able to receive the box.

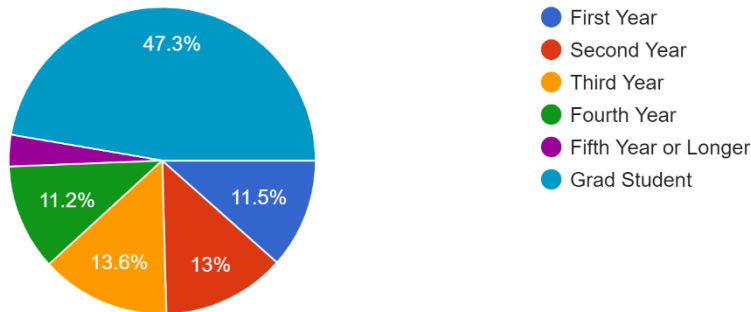
Please select the campus you study at:

814 responses



The distribution amongst year of study saw that almost half of all respondents were graduate students. However, we did notice discrepancies that some would indicate first year, while referring to the first year of a graduate degree. To amend that discrepancy for future, we would improve our question to specific whether the year refers to an undergraduate or a graduate degree.

Please select the year of study you are in:
814 responses



Although we did receive 814 responses in total from the form, we **only sent out 586 gift codes** for a small Produce box. This difference in form responses and total giftcard codes sent out are due to the following reasons:

- Duplicate form responses
- Invalid email addresses (i.e.. wrong or mistyped emails, non-university emails)
- Individuals who never responded to our initial email to confirm their interest with us
- Individuals who answered “no” to whether they lived within the delivery zone
- Those who no longer needed a box after filling out the form

Impact

- 586 gift codes that redeem a small produce box from FoodShare were sent out
- \$9376.00 worth of UTERN levy funds were used to support food insecure students
- Numerous emails of appreciation as well as personal anecdotes of the necessity of needing fresh produce at this time due to pandemic specific barriers to accessing fresh produce
- Emails that detail food insecurity beyond just the food pandemic

Improvements & Suggestions

One of the main questions that UTERN got asked is, is it possible to receive another box or whether the initiative will be available for a second round. We clearly see an enormous demand for access to fresh produce for students during the pandemic and even beyond the pandemic. It would be valuable if this initiative could benefit more students for multiple weeks rather than a one-time offer. We also received donation offers and there is potential for future university wide



initiatives to partner with other organizations on campus to reach a larger number of students by pooling both monetary and human resources together. Lastly, this initiative poses a question for UTERN as we think about how we can directly support students at the University of Toronto beyond the pandemic as food security and food system solutions are key to environmentalism and addressing climate change.