Under the direction of Dr. Mark Moritz, our Anthropology class conducted an ethnographic study of students’ eating behavior on campus using a combination of observations, semi-structured interviews, surveys and grounded theory. We found considerable differences between how students eat during the week and in the weekend. Students’ busy schedules shape where, what, when, how, and with whom they eat on campus.
1. Introduction
2. Ethnographic research
3. Findings
4. Discussion
INTRODUCTION
The goal of this study was to come to a better understanding of the factors that shape students' eating habits at the Ohio State University.
COLLABORATIVE COURSE PROJECT

- ANTHRO 5650: Research Design and Ethnographic Methods.
- OSU campus as a natural laboratory.
Studies of students’ eating behavior focus on:
- Food choice (nutrition, calories, labels)
- Health indicators (weight and BMI)
- Dorm versus off-campus eating habits
- Gender differences
- "Freshman 15"

The common methods are:
- Surveys
- Food diaries
- Body measurements

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Freshman Fifteen
ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH
MULTIPLE POINTS OF VIEW (POV)

ETHNOGRAPHY
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH

- IRA approach
  - Iterative
  - Recursive
  - Abductive

- Considering meaning and context questions
  - POV2 → POV1

- Increase understanding and narrow focus using grounded theory

We used an ecocultural approach as conceptual framework:

1. **Ecocultural context** (e.g., schedule of classes, institutions, living arrangements)
2. **Cultural models of development** (e.g., ideas that students have about food, their goals)
3. **Direct focus on activity settings** (e.g., everyday eating routines in social settings).
Observations of everyday eating activities in places on and around campus at different times during the week (n = 47).
Semi-structured interviews with descriptive questions to get students’ model of their own eating habits (n = 57).

Typical descriptive grand-tour question:
- Can you describe your typical eating habits throughout a school day? For example, when do you eat, what do you eat, where do you eat, with whom do you eat? Starting with the morning when you get up until at night when you go to bed?
Online survey using Google Drive (n = 356) to measure self-report of student eating behavior and eating preferences.

- Non-random sample of OSU students with 81% female respondents.

![Survey Image]
FINDINGS
EATING ALONE OR WITH OTHERS
A BUSY SCHEDULE ...

84% of students reported have a busy, very busy, or extremely busy schedule.
... MEANS EATING ALONE ... 

48% of surveyed students reported that they regularly or always eat alone.

"A lot of my lunches and dinners end up being in class, so I just eat alone."

"During the week-alone. Our schedules are pretty busy you know. If it's in between classes, I usually eat by myself."

"I usually tend to eat alone just because it's kind of a spur of the moment, "hey I'm kind of hungry and I have 20 minutes before class."
"I like can't do it, and it's really strange because, like, I was an only child so I was alone a lot, but eating alone I cannot do it. I just can't do it."

"I feel like you have to get used to it, like the first few times you do it, you're like - oh my gosh this is so weird."

"I'd probably be on my phone [when eating alone], just to not look super awkward."
Using mobile technology

Through experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of eating alone</th>
<th>Awkward scale (5=more awkward)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regularly</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Spearman’s R = -0.173, p = 0.005
"Yeah, if you eat with a group, people will talk and you will lose much time, especially on weekdays. But on weekends it doesn't matter - I think."

"On weekends, I eat in groups. Never alone."

"During the week alone...But on the weekends I'll go with friends or roommates [to eat]."
# Differences in Eating Habits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>When I eat with others</th>
<th>When I eat alone</th>
<th>P-level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I eat more</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy my food more</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>P&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I eat more slowly</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>P&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more aware of manners</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>P&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use my phone less</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>P&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 = strongly agree
2 = agree
3 = neutral
4 = disagree
5 = strongly disagree

Kruskal-Wallis Test (Nonparametric ANOVA)
DISCUSSION
1. To better understand students’ eating behavior we need to use a holistic approach that includes observations in natural settings and students’ cultural models.

2. It also requires a theory of human behavior that takes into account the habits, constraints, and emotions that shape how students experience and make decisions about eating.
PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Option 1
- Individual work spaces with electrical outlets and internet in restaurants so that students can work and socialize using FaceTime.

Option 2
- Seating arrangements that facilitate conversations with others that promote “civility and common purpose”.
An Ethnographic Study of

Students’ Eating Behavior On Campus

Monday 22 April, 10:20–11:15am in Scott Lab, Room 56

Under the direction of Dr. Mark Moritz, our Anthropology class conducted an ethnographic study of students’ eating behavior on campus using a combination of observations, semi-structured interviews, surveys and grounded theory. We found considerable differences between how students eat during the week and in the weekend. Students’ busy schedules shape where, what, when, how, and with whom they eat on campus.
THE END