

Inter-Cultural Food Bridging Society - Understanding the North American Food Culture

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Purpose: The number of international students enrolling in Canadian universities continues to grow. Understanding the diversity in dietary cultures is essential to enhance learning and living experiences in Canada. The Intercultural Food Bridging Society (ICFBS), a start-up society, was established to provide opportunities for international students at Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU) to engage with Canadian food culture.

Process: Food tours and learning activities are organized to support the learning needs of international students. Canadian students are encouraged to attend since learning experiences can inform cultural literacy for all students. Examples of ICFBS events include a fair-trade coffee tour, a harvest workshop, dining with seniors at a retirement home, a local food and drink tour, a healthy cooking class with a dietitian, and a local grocery store tour.

Systematic Approach Used: The Ecological Perspective approach and Logic Model have been adopted by ICFBS to plan each activity. Reflection is key in exploring learning aspects of all activities. Faculty advisors, fund raising activities and community partnerships support the society.

Conclusion: ICFBS is an innovative and reciprocal platform of learning, networking and cultural exchange for students and faculty that enhances the connection between international and Canadian students. The greater MSVU community has been positively influenced in unexpected ways.

Recommendations: Universities with nutrition programs can include the ICFBS framework to support the unique needs of international students while increasing cultural competency for all students.

Significance to the Field of Dietetics: ICFBS builds a bridge between Canadian and international food cultures in an academic setting to equip young professions entering this field with cultural competency. Strengthening cultural understandings and competency amongst students may translate into a professional practice that will better serve the diverse Canadian population.