

Do on- or off-campus university students have better eating competence?

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Introduction

Eating competence (EC) is described as an overall assessment of eating attitude (EA), food acceptance (FA), internal regulation (IR), and contextual skills (CS) regarding diet and lifestyle (1). EC has been researched among adult women and Hispanic populations (2,3). In the college setting, research shows relationships between EC scores and sexual minorities (4), first-generation status (5), weight status (6).

Off-campus college students who do not live at home are shown to be less adept regarding grocery shopping (7) and are more likely to engage in unhealthy behaviors such as underage and binge drinking (8). For these disparities, I believe there may also be differences in EC among off-campus college students.

Objectives

- To assess differences in mean total EC scores between undergraduate students living on-campus versus off-campus.
- To assess differences in mean EC subscores between undergraduate students living on-campus versus off-campus.

Methods

- Data were collected between 2015-2023 as part of an ongoing cross-sectional study, the College Health and Nutrition Assessment Survey (CHANAS). Students in the introductory nutrition course are recruited in each semester and informed consent is collected (UNH IRB #5524).

Data Collection:

- Participants self-reported via online questionnaire (Qualtrics) their living arrangements and EC via the eating competency Satter inventory (ecSI 2.0). The ecSI 2.0 is a 16-item questionnaire that evaluates total EC as well as EC subscores (1).

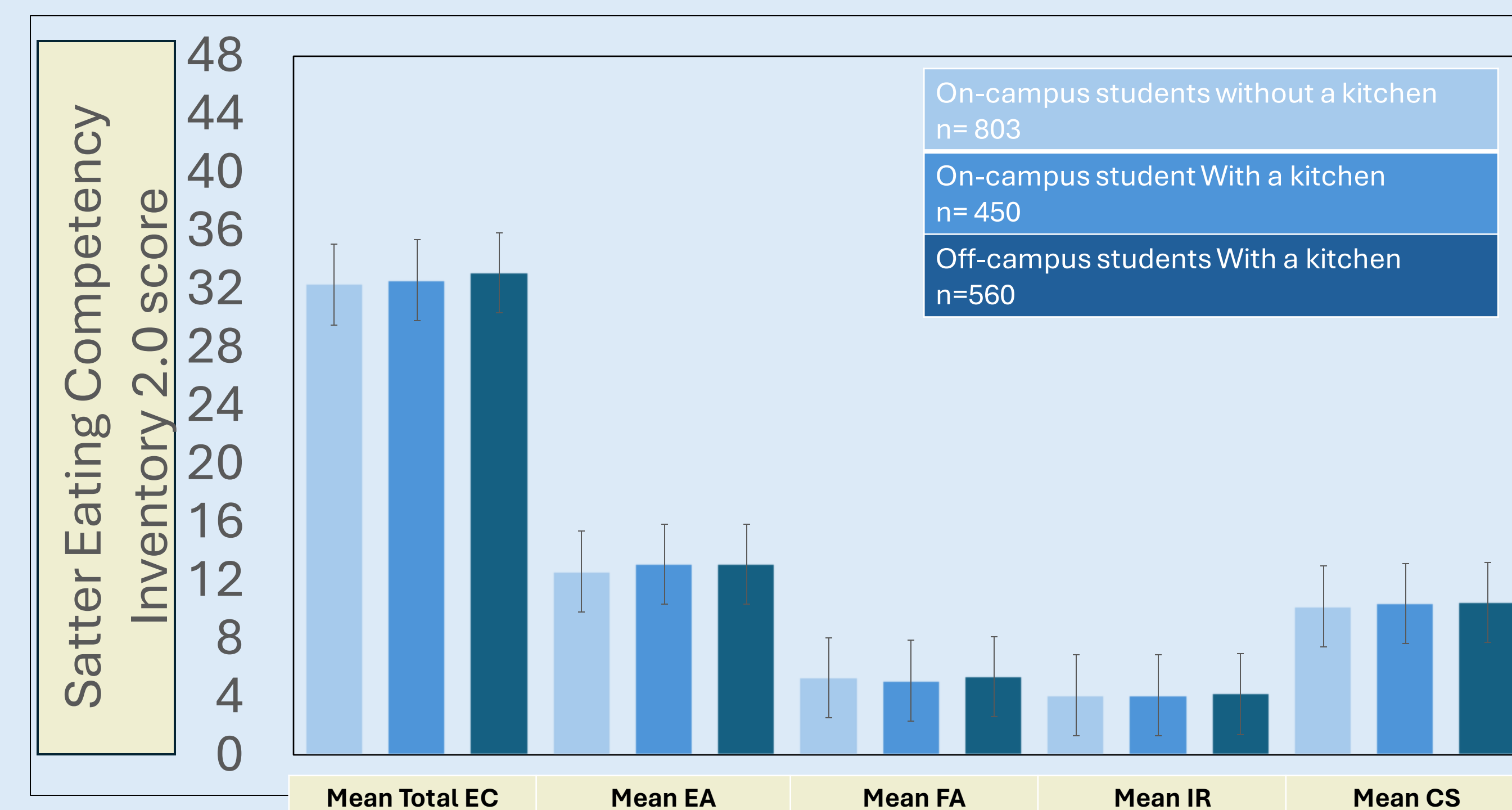
Data Analysis:

- Mean differences in ecSI scores and subscores between on-campus and off-campus students via ANCOVA, using gender, and age, as covariates, (SPSS v29).

Subject Demographic Table

	On-campus without a kitchen		On-campus with a kitchen		Off-campus with a kitchen		Total
	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Mean age	9.2 ± .79		19.6 ± .87		20.3 ± 1.2		
Gender							
Male:	289	34.8%	164	35.8%	274	45.3%	727
Female:	542	65.2%	294	64.2%	331	54.7%	1167
Total:	831		458		605		1894
Race							
White:	731	91.0%	427	94.5%	525	93.7%	1683
Asian:	28	3.5%	9	2%	18	3.2%	55
All other races:	44	5.6%	14	3.1%	17	3.0%	75
Total:	803		450		560		1813

Mean Eating Competence Total and Sub Scores



Eating Competence and Sub Score Breakdown

Total EC Score	0-48
Eating Attitude	0-18
Food Acceptance	0-9
Internal Regulation	0-6
Contextual Skills	0-15

An EC score of 32 or greater is categorized as being eating competent. A person's total EC score is the sum of their subscores (1).

- Eating Attitude:** Having a positive attitude and interest in food and eating
- Food Acceptance:** Having an interest in a variety of foods including new foods
- Internal Regulation:** Understanding hunger and satiety cues in supporting a healthy body
- Contextual Skills:** Having resources to manage and plan meals, as well as eat preferred foods.

Key Findings

There were no differences in the mean total EC scores or subscores between on-campus students with a kitchen, on-campus students without a kitchen, or off-campus students with a kitchen.

Conclusion

Results do not suggest that living arrangements influence one's total EC score, or their EA, FA, IR, and CS subscores in this sample of college students. It is shown that on average, university students are eating competent (total EC score > 32). More research is needed, but data suggests that a student's housing location or access to a kitchen might be a factor in their total EC score, or subscore.

Take Away

Living status does not likely influence students eating competence.

Acknowledgments

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