

Establishing a Full-Service Grocery Store in the New Campus Building

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Abstract

Florida Institute of Technology is currently planning to install a grab-and-go store in the new campus building; however, this report identifies a need for a full-service grocery store that would better address student health, accessibility, and sustainability goals. To evaluate feasibility, the project team conducted a literature review, a student survey, and an interview with the Student Government Association Dining Liaison. Findings show unanimous student support for an on-campus grocery store, with respondents indicating they would shop there regularly if prices were comparable to local retailers, and expert feedback emphasizing improved food diversity and independence as key benefits. The report recommends constructing a 10,000–12,000 sq. ft. full-service store through a vendor-partnership model that accepts meal plans and prioritizes affordable, fresh options. Implementing this recommendation would enhance student well-being, reduce off-campus travel, and strengthen Florida Tech’s long-term sustainability and retention objectives.

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Target Audience and Purpose

This report is intended for Florida Tech Main Melbourne campus administration, facilities planners, and dining/service partners making strategic decisions for the new on-campus building. The purpose is to recommend the development of a full-service grocery store rather than another dining hall — improving student health, independence, affordability, and enabling a car-free freshman policy.

Scope and Objectives

This report evaluates the following.

- Benefits of full-service campus grocery stores at other universities
- The nutritional and behavioral impacts of on-campus food access
- Feasibility considerations including demand, facility requirements, and student needs

Survey and interview results will be added once data collection is complete.

Project Team

Avery Mackey (B.S. Computer Science), Cedric Tabban (B.S. Aerospace Engineering). Responsible for research, design, and reporting under the guidance of their COM 2223 Scientific and Technical Communication instructors.

Background and Context

Many universities have demonstrated strong demand and satisfaction with campus supermarkets, especially where large populations of apartment-style housing and limited transportation access exist. George Washington University's 12,000 sq. ft. District Market attracts 75% of on-campus students and replaced a convenience-only model to provide fresh produce, prepared foods, and grocery staples. (Klein, 2005)

Health-behavior literature shows campus supermarkets increase student access to nutritious foods, increase convenience, reduce off-campus travel, and enhance autonomy in cooking and dietary choices. Moreover, increased grocery access is associated with healthier selections such as fruits and vegetables. (Enahora and McGuirt, 2020)

Currently the school is planning on putting a grab and go store as seen in Figure 1. While this is a step in the right direction, a full-service grocery store will provide much greater benefits in the long run, that justify the upfront costs



Figure 1

Example of the style of machine currently planned to be installed.

Project Overview

Evidence from comparable campuses, nutrition research, and forthcoming survey/interview data inform recommendations regarding store location, operations, and student-focused features.

Methods

Survey

Procedure

To assess student perspectives on food access and the potential demand for a full-service grocery store on campus, a short online survey was distributed to Florida Tech undergraduates in October 2025. The survey was conducted via Google Forms and collected 17 responses. Questions covered demographic details (academic year and housing status), transportation access, current grocery habits, and preferences for an on-campus store. Participants were also asked about the importance of sustainability initiatives and invited to provide open-ended feedback. Responses were collected anonymously to encourage honest opinions.

Limitations

While the survey provided valuable preliminary insights, it had a limited sample size of 17 participants and may not fully represent the diversity of the Florida Tech student body. The sample skewed toward first-year students living in dormitories, which may overstate the perceived need for on-campus options. Future iterations should aim for broader outreach, including upperclassmen, graduate students, and those living off-campus. Additionally, results were self-reported and subjective, which may introduce response bias.

Interview Procedure

An interview was conducted with Mr. Erik Laari, Student Government Association (SGA) Campus Dining Liaison, via email correspondence on November 6th, 2025. The purpose of the interview was to gather qualitative information on the current state of dining and retail services on campus, as well as perspectives on the potential establishment of a full-service grocery store at Florida Institute of Technology (Florida Tech).

The interview aimed to support a comprehensive report on dining accessibility and infrastructure development by incorporating informed opinions from a key student

representative engaged in campus dining policy and operations. Mr. Laari was selected due to his role as the SGA Dining Liaison, which involves liaising between the student body, university administration, and dining service providers.

The interview was conducted asynchronously via email to allow for detailed and reflective responses. The set of questions was developed collaboratively between the interviewer Cedric Tabban and Avery Mackey. The following are the questions that were given to Mr. Laari:

- How would you describe the current dining and retail options available to students on campus?
- What do you believe are the biggest strengths and weaknesses of the existing Panther Grocery and dining services?
- How does food accessibility impact student health and independence from your perspective?
- What would be the biggest challenges in implementing a full-service grocery store on campus?
- How do you think access to a full-service store would impact student social life, meal diversity, and community building?
- In your opinion, does building a full-service grocery align with university priorities such as sustainability, student satisfaction, and retention?

Before the interview, a prior in-person meeting was conducted by the interviewer Cedric Tabban to clearly communicate to the participant the purpose and intended use of the responses. Mr. Laari was informed that his statements would be quoted verbatim within the report and that his views represent his personal opinions as SGA Dining Liaison rather than official positions of Florida Tech.

The responses were reviewed and formatted for clarity, maintaining the original meaning and tone. No edits were made to the content beyond minor typographical adjustments for readability.

Discussion and Findings

This project seeks to evaluate the feasibility and potential benefits of implementing a full-service grocery store at Florida Tech, guided by documented outcomes at comparable universities and nutrition-focused research on grocery accessibility. The literature provides strong foundational support for improved access to full-service groceries as a health-promoting campus resource, and survey results indicate a strong desire for the benefits such a store would supply.

Benefits of Campus Grocery Access

Universities that have established full-service supermarkets report enhanced student independence, increased access to healthy foods, and reduced reliance on vehicles for essential shopping. George Washington University's District Market, a 12,000-square-foot campus supermarket, serves approximately 75% of the on-campus population and has replaced frequent off-campus travel with convenient grocery access. The model demonstrates that students with access to kitchens are highly motivated to shop and cook for themselves, driving sustained demand for fresh and nutritious items. (Klein, 2005)

Similarly, research evaluating the opening of a full-service supermarket within a university mixed-use residential area found that proximity improved student dietary intake, convenience, and autonomy in food selection. Students reported that visible produce, compatibility with campus payment systems, and accessible store footprints helped promote healthier eating behaviors. Identified challenges—such as higher prices, limited variety, and lack of cooking equipment—highlight important considerations for future planning. (Enahora and McGuirt, 2020)

Connections to Nutrition and Health Findings

Nutritional literature strongly supports improved produce access during early adulthood. College students frequently struggle to maintain healthy eating patterns, and lack of access to groceries contributes to poor fruit and vegetable consumption, quick-service food dependence, and barriers to adopting dietary patterns that reduce chronic disease risks. Research shows that shopping frequency and exposure to nutritious options increase adherence to dietary recommendations, including plant-forward patterns similar to the Mediterranean diet. (Ayala, [2024](#))

Furthermore, grocery shopping represents an opportunity to foster lifelong dietary habits. Educational approaches such as nutrition labeling and in-store cues have been shown to improve self-efficacy and consumption of healthy foods. When applied in campus grocery models, these mechanisms can amplify the positive impacts of physical access to food.

Projected Construction and Startup Costs

Establishing a full-service grocery store requires a considerable initial investment. Startup costs for small, independent grocery stores typically range from \$25,000 to \$50,000, while more expansive or specialized markets may require anywhere from \$50,000 to over \$400,000. These expenses vary primarily with store size, as smaller locations average around 3,000 square feet whereas mid-sized stores often occupy 10,000–15,000 square feet. Construction and renovation typically cost between \$15 and \$40 per square foot, with average retail rents ranging from \$18 to \$29 per square foot depending on location. Additional startup costs include refrigeration and shelving equipment, lighting and HVAC systems (around \$2 per square foot), and licensing or permitting fees that can total several thousand dollars. Collectively, these figures highlight the substantial financial commitment involved in developing a new grocery facility on campus, underscoring the importance of university partnerships and phased funding strategies to ensure long-term sustainability (Toast, Inc., [2024](#)).

Survey Results

The Florida Tech Student Grocery Access and Preferences Survey gathered responses from undergraduate students in October 2025. The survey aimed to assess current grocery shopping behaviors, transportation accessibility, and overall support for introducing a full-service grocery store on campus. Respondents represented a mix of class years, with more than half having kitchen access, as seen in Figure 2. Nearly half of participants reported lacking regular access to a personal vehicle, emphasizing a potential mobility barrier to off-campus grocery shopping.

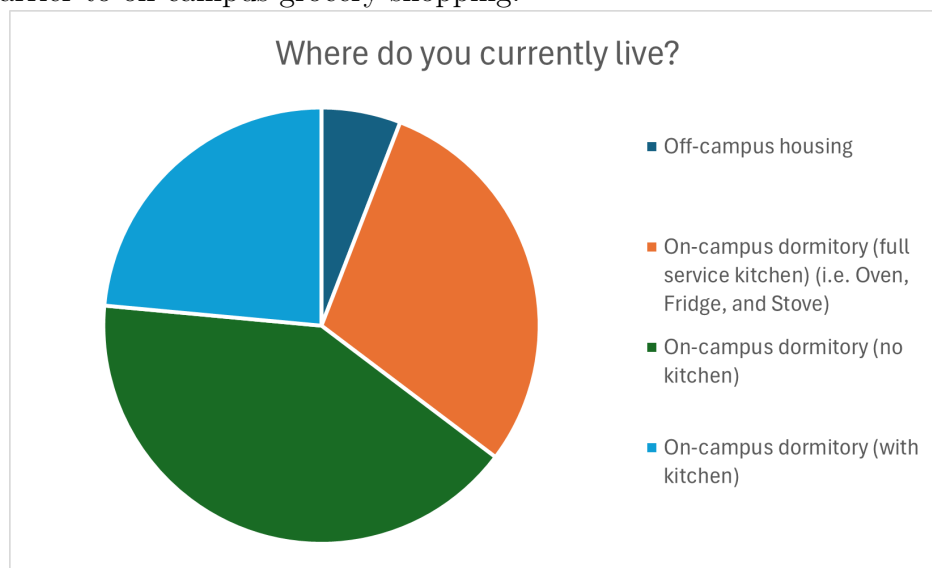


Figure 2

Where do you currently live?

In terms of shopping frequency, most respondents indicated that they shop for groceries off campus either once a week or a few times per month, with Walmart and Publix being the most commonly cited destinations. This trend reflects the limited on-campus availability of diverse grocery options and the dependency on external retailers for basic food supplies.

Support for an on-campus grocery store was overwhelmingly positive. All respondents selected either *Support* or *Strongly Support* when asked about the addition of a full-service campus market as seen in Figure 3. When prompted to rate the likelihood of

shopping at such a store if prices were comparable to Walmart or Publix, the average response was 4.7 out of 5, indicating a strong intent to utilize the service regularly.

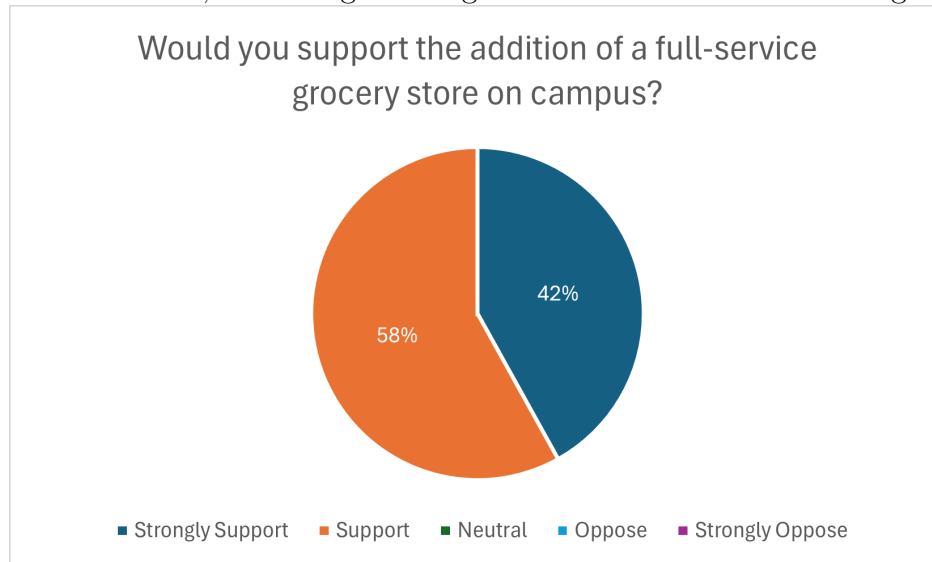


Figure 3

Would you support the addition of a full-service grocery store on campus?

Regarding desired product offerings, as seen in figure Figure 4, students most frequently selected fresh fruits and vegetables, common cooking ingredients, and household items as top priorities, suggesting that the store could serve both nutritional and convenience needs. Sustainability initiatives were also well received, with an average importance rating of 3.8 out of 5 for practices such as local sourcing and reusable bag programs.

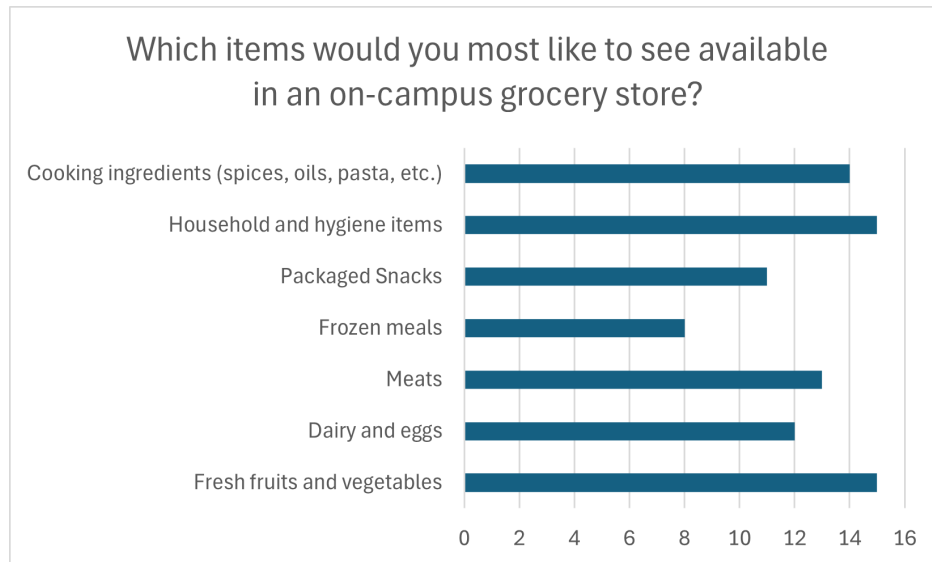


Figure 4

Which items would you most like to see available in an on-campus grocery store?

The survey results also indicated that the majority of respondents had a strong likelihood of shopping at a campus grocery store if prices were comparable to major retailers such as Publix or Walmart, as seen in Figure 5. Specifically, most responses were rated 4 or 5 on the 5-point scale. This suggests that affordability and competitive pricing would be key factors driving consistent student patronage, indicating substantial potential demand if cost parity with local stores can be maintained.

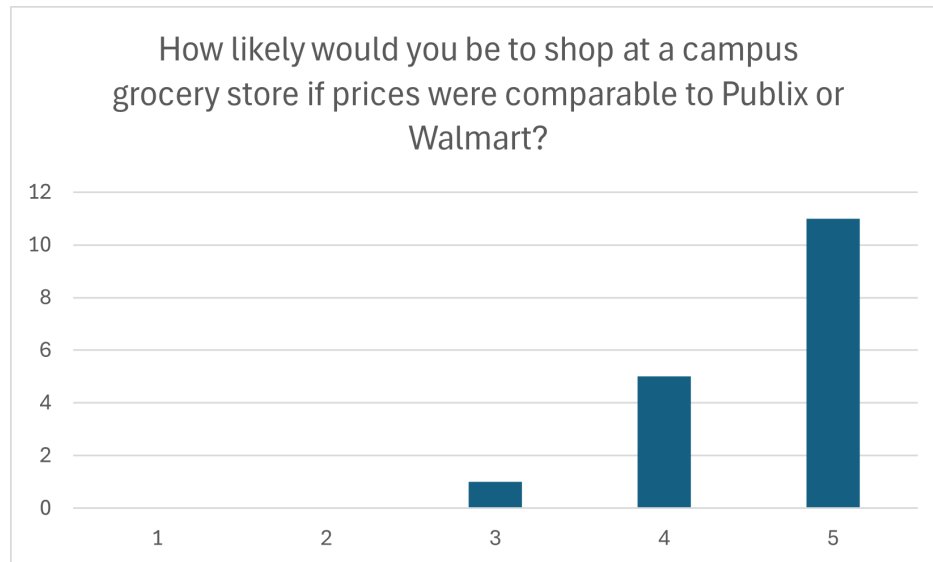


Figure 5

How likely would you be to shop at a campus grocery store if prices were comparable to Publix or Walmart?

Qualitative responses further reinforced the quantitative findings. Students noted that an on-campus grocery store would “save time and transportation costs,” “encourage healthier eating habits,” and “make on-campus living more convenient.” Others highlighted the benefit of increased independence for underclassmen who do not have vehicles or access to kitchens. To quote one particularly eloquent individual, “Me want.”

Overall, the survey results demonstrate a clear and consistent demand for a full-service grocery store on the Florida Tech campus. The responses indicate that such a facility would significantly improve student convenience, promote healthier eating habits, and align with the university’s sustainability and car-free freshman initiatives.

Interview with Erik Laari, SGA Campus Dining Liaison

As part of this report on the feasibility of establishing a full-service grocery store at Florida Tech, an interview was conducted by Cedric Tabban with **Erik Laari**, the Student Government Association’s (SGA) Campus Dining Liaison, on November 6th, 2025.

Mr. Laari emphasized that his responses represent his personal opinions in his role as

Dining Liaison and are not official statements of the University (Laari, personal communication, November 2025).

According to E. Laari (personal communication, November 2025):

Current Dining and Retail Options

The current dining and retail options, consisting of the Panther Dining Hall (PDH), Panther Grocery, Center Court inside the Clemente Center, the Rathskeller, and the mini food court on the 1st floor of the Student Union Building (SUB), offer a variety of food options at varying degrees of reliability and hours. PDH, being the most consistent, is open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., almost every day (excluding holidays), and cycles through breakfast, lunch, and dinner throughout the day. It offers a nice variety in meal scheduling from day to day and week to week, even showcasing certain specialty nights where the staff and administration go all out with our Global Kitchen Series events. Panther Grocery is a solid grab-n-go option for students without meal swipes or in a hurry, as they can order from their more limited menu or grab something made fresh each day by the kitchen, including sandwiches, sushi, wraps, and more. As a retail option, it offers most necessities that a college student would need, and these can be purchased using student Flex dollars. The Rathskeller is a late-night pizza and grill option that offers delivery to all student housing areas. The Center Court area and SUB food court are the only areas, I believe, that are closed on weekends. Still, they do consist of third-party vendors (Firehouse Subs, Einstein Bros Bagels, Starbucks, etc.) that have partnered with the school to offer a wider selection of food in more locations on campus, all while being accessible using student Flex dollars as well. For food-insecure students, there is a need-based food pantry, which consists of donations overseen by the SGA and the Dean of Students' Office.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Panther Grocery and Dining Services

I think the greatest strengths of Panther Grocery are the Lunch Specials they offer each day, a meal at a fairly reasonable price that rotates daily, the ability to buy basic dorm necessities using Flex dollars, and its accessibility, being located almost in the middle of the campus and having practical hours for students. I think one area for improvement would be a better mobile ordering system or a revamp of the current one to better handle rushes during lunch and after common class periods, as the small space tends to get crowded during these times of high activity.

Food Accessibility and Student Health

Food accessibility is an often-overlooked factor in student health and well-being. It is very easy to get caught up in everything that college entails: challenging classes, late-night studying, fun but demanding extracurricular activities, playing varsity sports, and much more. Having a reliable and convenient food area provides a solution to a fundamental need for most college students, which is often why the meal plans that provide unlimited PDH access are recommended to FTIC students (also because there are limited cooking utensils and appliances in those related dormitory areas).

Challenges in Implementing a Full-Service Grocery Store

In my opinion, the current biggest challenges arise simply due to how the University realizes its most critical points for expansion. We know that Florida Tech wants to expand, and as of right now, dining services are not at the forefront of that conversation. Funding is being spent in much more needed areas to support the University's ambitions, such as housing (Crimson Crossing), classroom space, and faculty development. I am aware that there is discussion about a miniature dining hall or food area in the newest housing

location, which, in conjunction with the current options, would theoretically be capable of serving the entire student population, even after the expansions.

Another challenge would be the physical location and space. We are somewhat landlocked as a University, so finding a plot of land large enough to accomplish that implementation would be rather difficult.

Impact on Student Life, Diversity, and Community

I think that it could significantly improve meal diversity. Having a full-service store would allow many of our diverse student community groups to access a wider selection of foods, including those that better reflect the diversity of our University. I would venture to think it would also have a positive impact on student social life, as more resources are available to them. I cannot envision how it would impact community building unless the store was also open to the public, which, if implemented, would likely be a decision made by University leadership, rather than any one department alone.

Alignment with University Priorities

As stated in my previous answer, probably not at this moment. I do think that greater access to a full-service store would be beneficial to the student body, however, given my current understanding of the University's plans for expansion and how our University is nestled into the Melbourne area, I think this can be accomplished in the meantime by looking into resources to provide increased access to already existing, third-party, full-service stores such as the Neighborhood Walmart on Babcock St. Once the University has reached a student population that is more aligned with what a University-owned and operated store has to offer, then it might be brought into discussion. As far as student satisfaction and retention are concerned, I would like to think that the grocery options on campus are not the most significant reasons for students to

be dissatisfied or, worse, leave the school.

Implications for Florida Tech

The literature suggests that a full-service grocery store at Florida Tech could do the following:

- Increase student access to fresh, nutritious foods
- Promote dietary habits that support long-term health
- Reduce transportation dependency and associated costs
- Improve the student living experience and campus sustainability goals.

Conclusions

Existing external evidence strongly supports the viability and value of an on-campus full-service grocery store as a means to enhance nutrition, convenience, and student satisfaction. Survey and interview data further contextualize these outcomes for Florida Tech and inform detailed planning decisions.

Recommendations

Primary Recommendation

Construct and operate a full-service grocery store in the new campus building to replace a redundant dining hall plan.

Implementation Plan

- Vendor partnership model
- Accept student meal plans and financial aid debit
- Store footprint 5,000–6,000 sq. ft., mixed-use space
- Operational focus on fresh, affordable staples and prepared meals.

Risks and Mitigations

- Pricing concerns → bulk purchasing partnerships and student pricing protections
- Stocking challenges → phased roll-out and local sourcing.

Expected Outcomes

Improved nutrition, campus sustainability, reduced off-campus travel, increased student satisfaction, and stronger university retention and brand identity.

References

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Appendix A

Survey Instrument

The following questions were included in the Florida Tech Student Grocery Access & Preferences Survey, conducted in October 2025 to assess student shopping habits, accessibility, and interest in an on-campus grocery store.

1. **What is your current year at Florida Tech?** (Freshman / Sophomore / Junior / Senior / Graduate Student / Other)
2. **Where do you currently live?** (On-campus dormitory with kitchen / On-campus dormitory without kitchen / Off-campus housing / With family / Other)
3. **Do you have regular access to a personal vehicle?** (Yes / No)
4. **How often do you shop for groceries off campus?** (More than once a week / Once a week / A few times a month / Rarely or never)
5. **Which stores do you most often shop at?** (Walmart, Publix, Target, Aldi, Winn Dixie, Other)
6. **Would you support the addition of a full-service grocery store on campus?** (Strongly Support / Support / Neutral / Oppose / Strongly Oppose)
7. **Which items would you most like to see available in an on-campus grocery store?** (Select all that apply: Fresh fruits and vegetables / Dairy and eggs / Meat and seafood / Packaged snacks / Frozen foods / Personal care items / Other)
8. **How likely would you be to shop at a campus grocery store if prices were comparable to Publix or Walmart?** (1 = Very Unlikely, 5 = Very Likely)
9. **How important is it that the store supports sustainability (e.g., local sourcing, reusable bags)?** (1 = Not Important, 5 = Very Important)

10. **How would an on-campus grocery store impact your daily life?** (Select all that apply: Save me time and transportation costs / Encourage healthier eating habits / Make on-campus living more convenient / Give me a better way to use my flex cash / No significant impact)

11. **Please share any additional thoughts or suggestions regarding a campus grocery store.** (Open-ended)

Appendix B

Survey Results

What is your current year at Florida Tech?

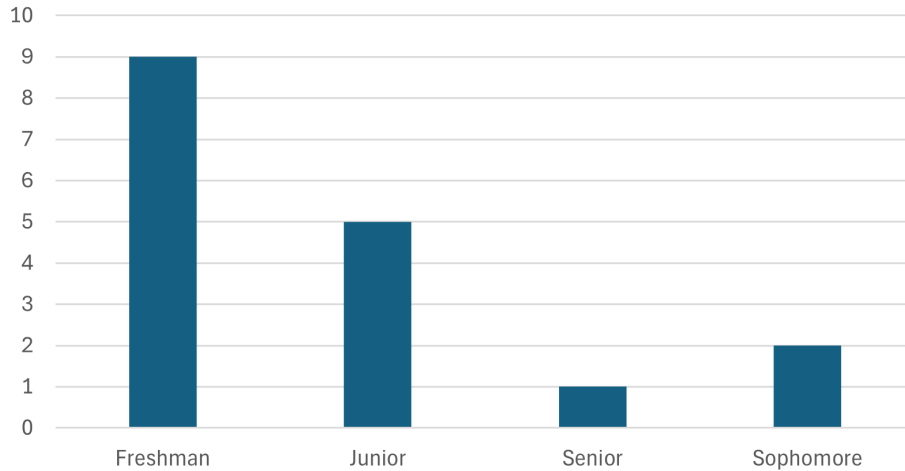


Figure B1

What is your current year at Florida Tech?

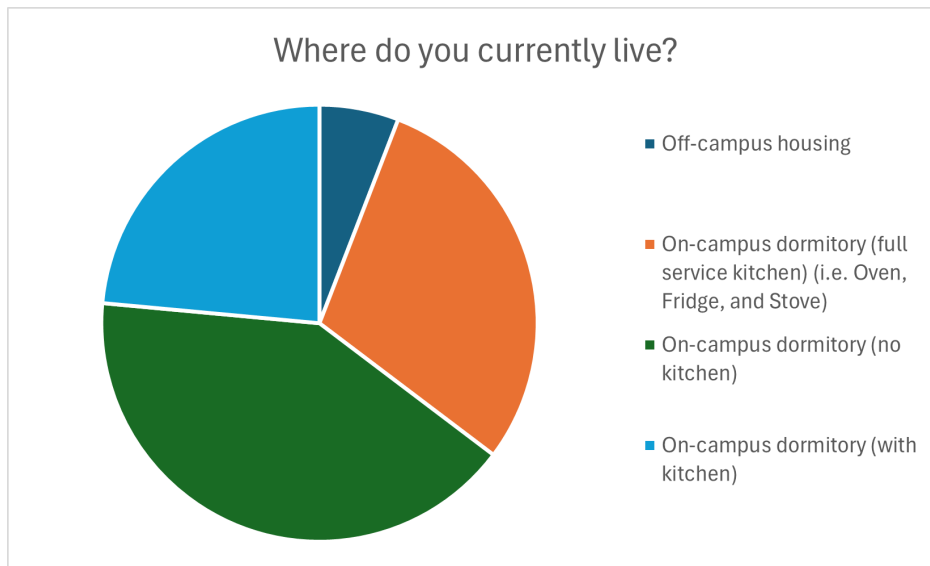


Figure B2

Where do you currently live?

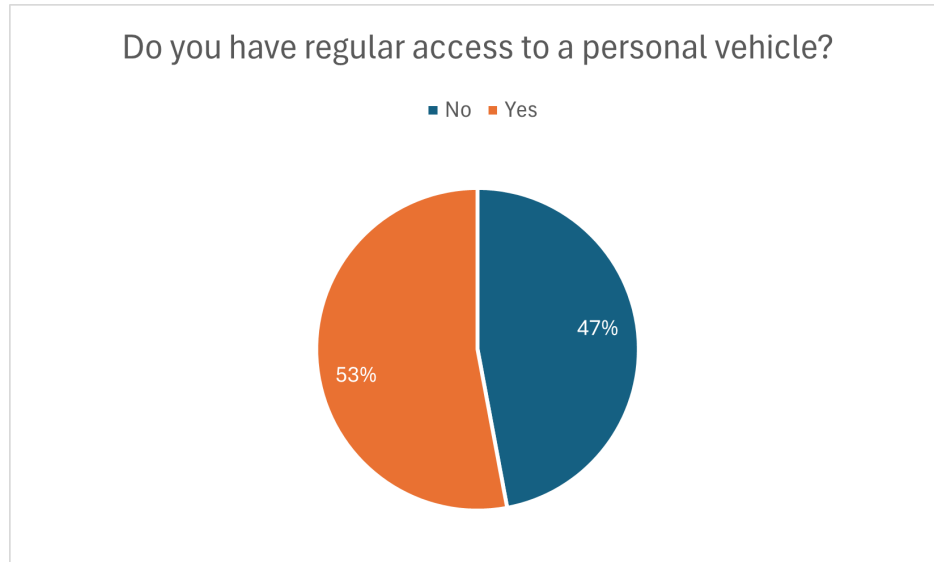


Figure B3

Do you have regular access to a personal vehicle?

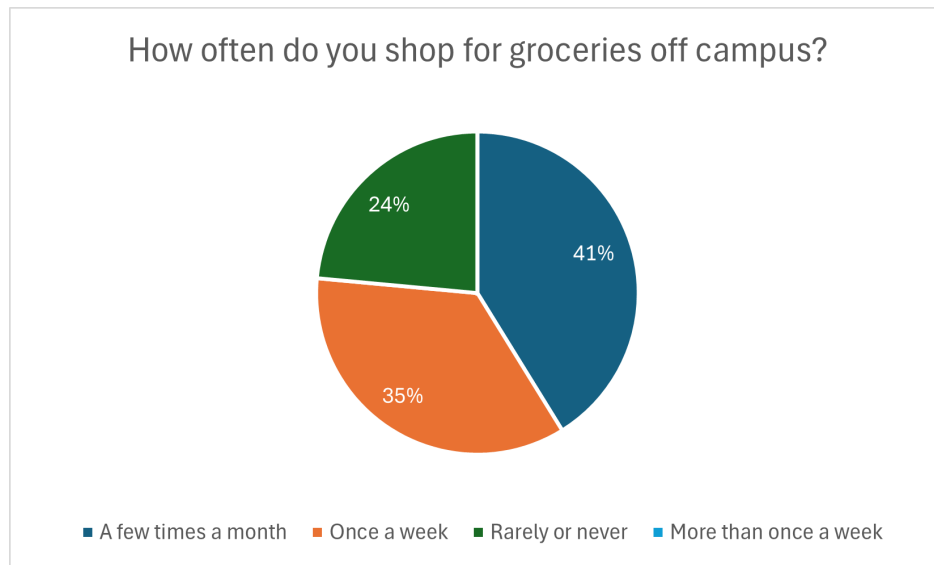


Figure B4

How often do you shop for groceries off campus?



Figure B5

Which stores do you most often shop at?

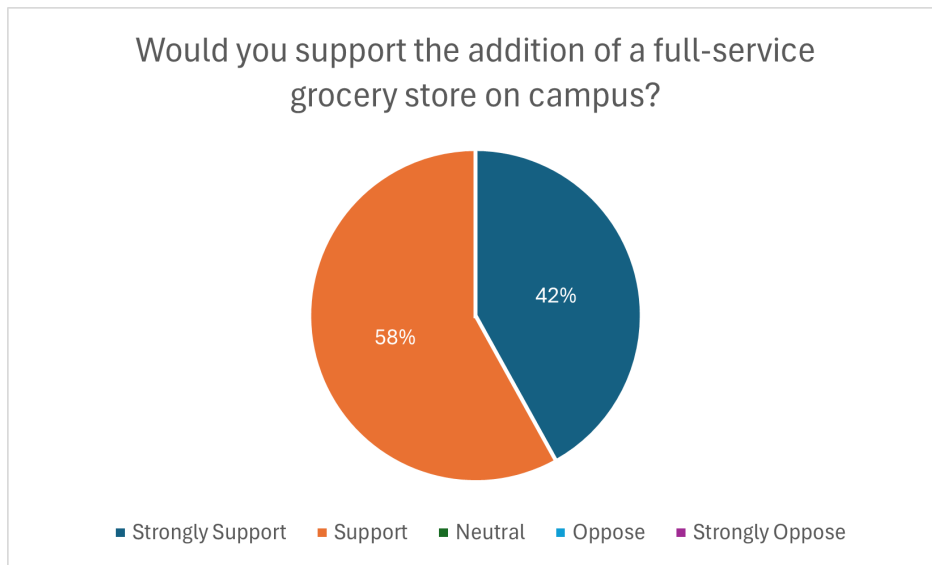


Figure B6

Would you support the addition of a full-service grocery stor on campus?

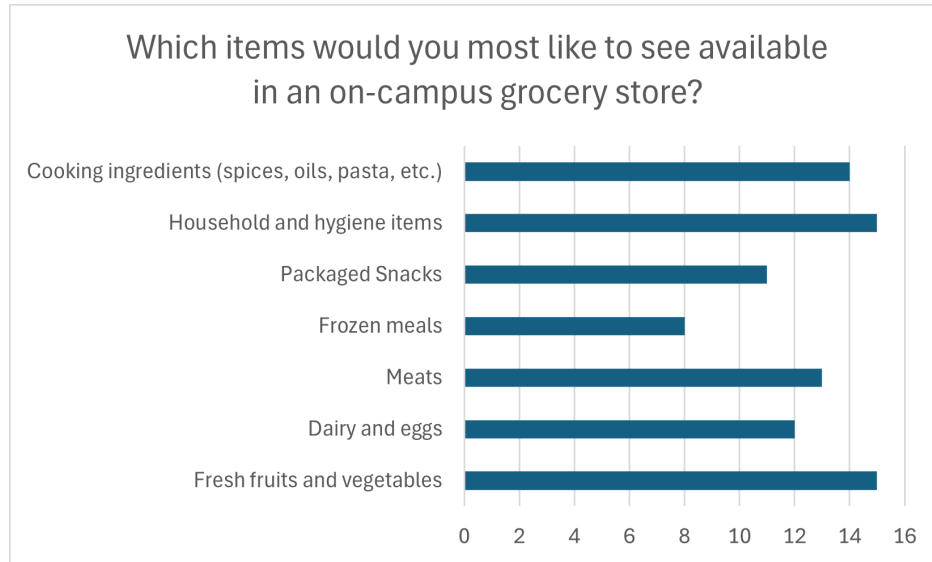


Figure B7

Which items would you most like to see available in an on-campus grocery store?

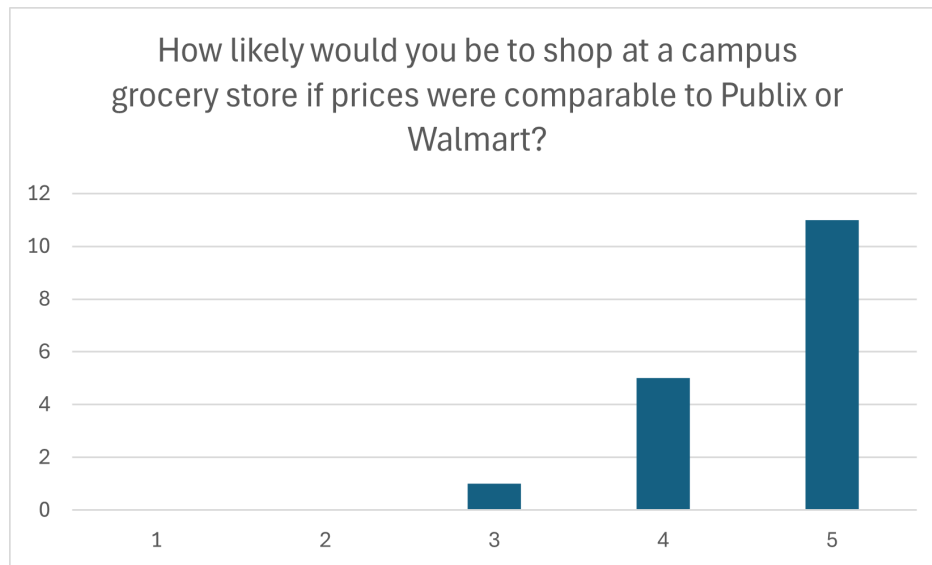


Figure B8

How likely would you be to shop at a campus grocery store if prices were comparable to a Publix or Walmart?



Figure B9

How important is it that the store supports sustainability (e.g., local sourcing, reusable bags)?

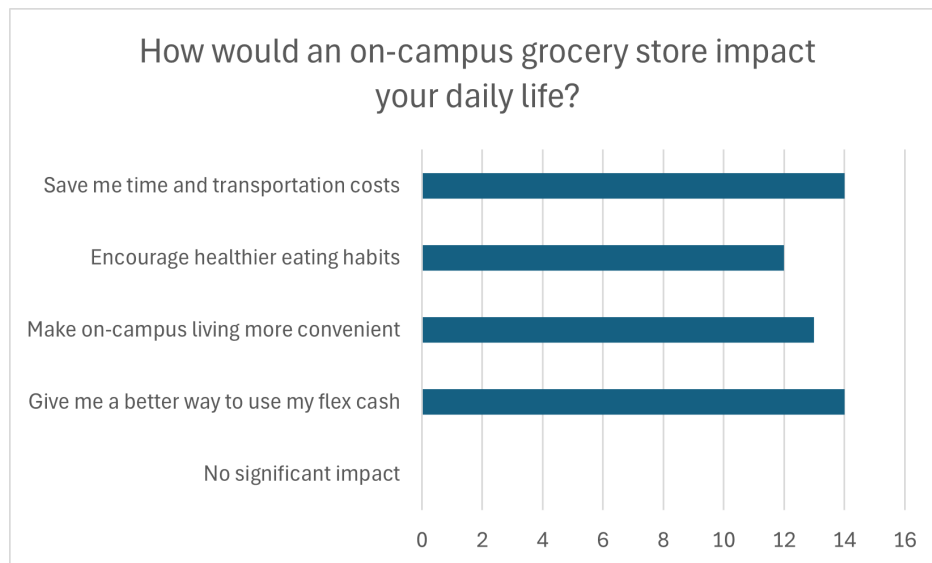


Figure B10

How would an on-campus grocery store impact your daily life?