Dining Hall Working Group

Minutes

Friday, October 8th, 2021 – 6pm-6:55pm

Costs

Anne Macdonald spoke to the working group about the complexities of pricing as a follow-up to the discussion last week. Anne spoke about budgets, costs associated with the overall Food Services meal plan which include two main costs - labour (46%) for staff required to run the operation and the cost of goods (33%) which includes cost of raw ingredients, and packaging, etc. Other costs include: operating costs (9%) would include costs for supplies, cleaning, equipment repair and replacement, facilities (12%) are charges associated with space costs and utilities. Further discussion about the complexities of pricing will occur during meetings of the Chestnut Food Committee scheduled to start at the end of October.

Anne explained that the Food Services department is an Ancillary Operation of the University of Toronto, and is expected to be self-funded, and the department is required to charge fees to run the operation. This means that all costs of the Food Services program must be covered by the fees associated with the operations. The expectation is tuition fees cannot be used to fund Ancillary Operations as those fees are meant for classrooms, funding of faculty, etc.

Anne shared that the institution as a whole recognizes that students come from varied financial backgrounds, and that the institution has made support available to students seeking financial assistance.

Max Mizrahi raised a question about profits within the Residence Dining Program. Anne shared that the profit is usually reinvested into the Food Services program for renovations, upgrades, capital projects. Essentially it is a non-profit organization, where profits made can then be reinvested.

Michael Lawler posed a question about the cost approval process related to the Residence Dining program in terms of removing the pay-per-weight model, lowering the price on approximately 30 items, and refunding a portion of the meal plan to students. Anne shared that the approval process would belong to her office. She further explained that last year was a difficult example where the pandemic brought forth unforeseen costs, and an 11 million dollar deficit. In terms of removing the pay-per-weight model, lowering the price on approximately 30 items, and refunding a portion of the meal plan to students, those decisions all increased the deficit, but were necessary to reduce costs for students. Anne explained that even with reduced occupancy in residence, there are inherent costs that need to be covered to keep the dining halls open. Unfortunately, last year, the reduced occupancy further increased the deficit, as the base costs that would normally be covered in any other year, were not covered.

Zahir Firoze raised a question about if the costs associated with the Residence Dining program were different in the all-you-care-to-eat model compared to the declining balance model. Anne explained that there were no differences in the percentages, and that further information would be shared in the Chestnut Food Committee. Zahir also requested we share the dollar value associated with the percentages.
Max was able to obtain the financial statements for Food Services online and observed that the Food Services department was in a loss for the past four years. It was mentioned that the discussion of the financial statements would continue in the first Chestnut Food Committee meeting. Anne mentioned that Food Services has not been financially successful over the last 4 years but that is because of a significant transition in 2016. The institution has been patient and understanding that the Ancillary department has taken control of an important student service. The pandemic in 2020 also did not help matters, but overall the university expects the department to run at cost, and does not normally expect them to lose money. Anne further mentioned that the food service industry does traditionally have a lower success rate, and that restaurants have a different cost structure, which cannot be applied to the residence dining program at the University of Toronto St. George. Further explanation and details would be shared at the Chestnut Food Committee.

**Procurement**

Jaco Lokker spoke about the product shortages within the food industry, the struggle to get product, and the consistent supply chain constraints. Factors such as the drought in the Prairies, labour shortages, gasoline prices and the carbon tax were all discussed.

Michael Lawler posed a question seeking data about local food procurement. Jaco shared that more information would be available at the first Chestnut Food Committee meeting.

**Resident Experience**

Jaco followed up on the consistency of portions and has provided feedback to the team accordingly. Plated portions will also be displayed at the station. It does not seem feasible to write the menu on the plexi glass but students are recommended to visit our website/mobile app to check the menu online, before coming to the dining hall, and use the screens/ menu tags at the station as well.

Jaco shared his screen to illustrate how to use the online menu after a question from Ciel Li about the ingredients at the build-your-own/ customizable pan station. He also shared that the rotation of the vessel that contains the customizable ingredients will allow for better visual for the residents.

Michael Jeronimo shared information about the upcoming mobile app kitchen with a tentative launch date at the end of October. He shared a progress update on equipment install and electrical. Eliza Davies-Greenwald mentioned that it is an entirely new kitchen being constructed to facilitate mobile-app ordering at Chestnut.

Michael Jeronimo spoke about a tablet POS “line buster” which is being explored. This will give an additional staff member the ability to process transactions during peak periods to reduce wait times for residents. Michael also shared that additional cashier training will be conducted to help speed up processing times, and the department is exploring a software enhancement for when cashiers have to manually enter the 16-digit TCard barcode for students who have not yet received their TCard from the TCard office- which is slowing down the line significantly.
Michael Pietrocarlo thanked students for participating and assured students that the department is listening, and looks forward to continuing the discussion at the Chestnut Food Committee meetings.

Colin Porter addressed concerns regarding social distancing within the dining hall and how additional staff have been deployed within the dining hall. It is anticipated that as of Oct 29th, further communication regarding restrictions will be shared by the institution.

Jaco Lokker shared that there are staff assigned who are responsible to sanitize tables, high-touch points, monitor the regeneration station. Colin mentioned the placement of sanitizing wipes within the dining hall to allow students to sanitize in between the regular sanitation that is currently happening.

Ciel Li posed a question about eating in the urban lounge. Eliza shared that currently not permitted to eat there as the space is not set up as an additional dining space, but that the team is working with Environmental Health and Safety to have other seating areas available and will make sure to share updates with the Chestnut Food Committee.

Ciel posed a question about the paper straws getting soggy. Colin shared that we are looking into alternatives to the paper straws, plastic cutlery, and sourcing compostable containers, and will have an update at the Chestnut Food Committee. The team just needs to ensure that the alternatives are robust enough so that a similar situation to the paper straws is not experienced.

**Chestnut Food Committee**

Mustafa Nalwala shared that call-out for applications went out in the Chestnut Chatter newsletter earlier in the day (Oct 8), and all interested individuals are requested to apply. The intention is to get one representative per floor to allow for discussion and facilitate proper communication back out to residents. The goal is to have the inaugural meeting during the last week of October.