

Spaces & Experiences

CHESTNUT RESIDENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE (RAC)

January 20th, | 4:30 - 6:00 PM

University Room, Chestnut Residence

Meeting Minutes

IN ATTENDANCE

Name	Role
Steve Masse	Dean of Residence and Director of Student Life
Aisalyn Templin	Administration and Communications Assistant (Secretary)
Andrea Nelson	Rooms Manager
Eliza Davies-Greenwald	Assistant Dean, Residence Administration (Chair)
Farheen Khan	Chestnut Residence Lead Don
Jeffrey Bruyey	Director, Retail and Residence Dining
Jessi Sidhu	Assistant Dean, Residence Life
Jordan Craig	Occupancy and Admissions Coordinator
Joshua Cheng (virtual)	Chestnut Residence Council President
Obii Udemgba	Chestnut Residence Student
Sangeeta Jeyakumar	Manager, Finance, Administration and Operations
Tapur Verma	Urban Crew Manager
That Thiri Oo (Tina) (virtual)	Chestnut Residence Student
Young Mo Lee	Chestnut Residence Council Vice-President, Finance

REGRETS

Name	Role
Chelsea Chen	Chestnut Residence Council Vice-President, Social
Kevin Dancy	Director of Residence Operations

AGENDA

- Food Services Meal Plan report
- Chestnut Residence Student Survey update
- Gender Inclusive Housing Project report
- Residence Council report
- Other Business

FOOD SERVICES MEAL PLAN REPORT

Jeffrey Bruyca, Director, Retail and Residence Dining, provided the Committee with an overview of the current meal plan, as well as some of the anticipated changes for the 2025-26 academic year.

In preparation for the 2024-25 academic year, Food Services moved from a declining balance meal plan to a new model that best serves students. After consulting a variety of stakeholders, a decision was made to transition to all you care to eat (access) plans with three options. This model incorporates Dining Dollars and a takeout allowance of three meals per week. Overall, Food Services is satisfied with the utilization of the access plans.

For the 2025-26 academic year there will be two plans, Unlimited and Access 14. The same rules and conditions will apply. There will be some portability. Students will be able to use a specified number of swipes outside of their home location. Food Services currently offers three takeout meals a week, and an Eco-container. This will remain in place next year. The Dining Dollars will stay with the student for their time at U of T. When a student leaves the University, the money can be refunded (less a small admin fee). Food Services is in the approval process for rates, they are looking at a 4% increase.

Moving forward, Food Services would like to further optimize menus, based on student and staff feedback. They are looking at some new, fun options, such as a soft-serve ice cream machine.

Discussion

A staff member asked why the move was made to eliminate access 10? Jeffrey replied that Food Services needs a certain amount of overhead to maintain their standards. The program needs to be structured in a sustainable way. This requires students to commit to eating primarily in their residence.

A student commented on the variety of food, particularly bread and beverages. A perceived lack of selection may hold some back from eating in the Dining Commons. Another student asked, can we take into account students who work off-campus, such as graduate students at the hospitals? Staff replied that we have to ensure that the exception does not become the rule. Students have to choose the best plan for them. We have an allowance that will help the students. We look at cases where there are extenuating circumstances.

Staff highlighted that at Oak House the vast majority of graduate and second-entry students are going to be accommodated in suites. They will not be required to purchase a meal plan. The vast majority will have access to a full kitchen. Food Services will steer these students towards a 'commuter plan' that is being developed. This would give them absolute versatility.

A student commented that we should highlight the pros and cons of the different meal plans. Many students do not know about the Dining Commons hours and operations. Staff responded that we encourage every student to read the meal plans terms and conditions. Most questions can be answered by visiting the website. The locations next year will rotate the menu options with a different cycle. This will provide more variety. We don't want to overwhelm students with information.

CHESTNUT RESIDENCE STUDENT SURVEY UPDATE

Eliza Davies-Greenwald highlighted that the goal this year was to boost the survey completion rate. Strategies included the use of a large whiteboard in the lobby to promote the leading floor, increased monetary incentives, as well as individual and floor prizes.

Last year there was 25% completion, this year it increased to 42%. Better data helps us make improvements. A full overview of the survey results will be offered to the Committee in March. We will work with Graduate House and Knox Residence to compare the results.

Discussion

A student highlighted that they promoted the survey at various socials and spoke about potential prizes. Actively speaking to students can be very motivating. Asking them to complete the survey during floor meetings is a good strategy. Passive attempts will have a limited effect. Staff replied that we can survey the Dons to find out what was successful.

A student commented that there were a lot of questions (this year there were 91). This can deter a student from completion. We should focus on improving the experience. It might be better to offer the survey more than once, but if it was shorter. It feels like a big commitment. Staff replied that this year we were focused on standardizing the questions. We will do a review and attempt to eliminate questions when we can. If we can collect the data differently, then we will.

GENDER INCLUSIVE HOUSING PROJECT REPORT

Jordan Craig presented some changes coming to the residence room and roommate selection process this coming year. Currently, the Ontario-wide application has gender identifiers, and this data gets transferred to us. There are 5 hard-coded genders. At the room selection phase, the system will only let you select a roommate with the same gender marker, even if the staff have enabled you to match as roommates.

A portion of residents select an option other than the binary option. The goal is to allow all students to have the same selection and autonomy. We would like to reduce the barriers to enable all students to participate fully. Better information allows us to improve the process and experience.

Students will be able to opt-in to gender inclusive housing, without having to tell us about your gender. Students will have full information about the program. They can then select their preferences. There will be options with more and less restrictive options in place. This removes

additional steps and improves compatibility. We are offering student and staff consultations. Our timeline is to have this in place for the upcoming academic cycle.

Discussion

A staff member asked if we could restrict visibility. Jordan replied that there are options to restrict for certain groups, depending what other data is on a student's profile.

A student asked if people could change their mind during the process, if they change their preferences. Staff commented that we want to allow students to change their mind.

RESIDENCE COUNCIL REPORT

A representative from the Residence Council highlighted the student voice, as experienced through interactions. Common topics include elevator concerns and fire alarms. There are also recurring concerns about the laundry room, loading funds, and other issues with the units. Repeated patterns have emerged. Students report issues through various channels. Things get better, but with limitations.

Discussion

A staff member commented that we respond directly to the student, with transparent information, including the steps that are being taken. It is not necessarily the same problem re-occurring, but with the size of the building, there are many issues that come up throughout the year. There are communication gaps with respect to different departments within the building.

A staff member replied that there are instances where we can do better, although the teams are working hard to resolve concerns and be more responsive. We can work more diligently to address concerns quickly. There is work going on behind the scenes to address the larger issues. It is helpful to hear back when a student has a complaint. With elevator issues, we are looking at better ways to communicate. We are going to develop a calling card process to better explain if work has been addressed. We could consider allocating a portion of the newsletter to address building wide concerns.

Staff commented that residents should use Starrez so that we can track and respond, with different departments in the building. This will ensure that the operations team is aware.

OTHER BUSINESS

A student commented that we should have hand washing stations in the Dining Commons. This could be sinks where students can wash their hands with water and soap in the sink.

We will share the minutes, for edits, and the finalized minutes in advance of the next meeting.