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# COVID -19 and University Dining How the pandemic shaped the new norm for UIUC Dining

Crystal Smith

Eastern Illinois University



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## Introduction

Dining programs at colleges and universities provide a service and a space to facilitate connection and communication through food. COVID-19 caused university dining to pivot and has continued to keep it on a swivel. Menus were streamlined, concepts and variety limited. The days of self-service all-you-care-to-eat wiped away. New sanitation and safety protocols in place, limited to no dine in, and all things disposable, has led to a disjointedness. Production factories shut down or limited their production lines, pinching the supply chain and increasing food cost. The events typically hosted to facilitate commensality between cultures are caught in a holding pattern, masked by the obligation to maintain a safe environment that keeps the waves of positive cases to a minimum. Food, much like music, is a universal art form; a way to communicate and connect with others like and unlike ourselves. The fear created from the COVID-19 storm changed the way people access and consume food

## Background

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, has a self-operating Dining program. There are five all-you-care-to eat facilities which include two traditional locations, two multivenue, and one location operating six micro restaurants. In addition to the five dining facilities, there are three retail locations, and two coffee/tea bars.

## Materials

Data was compiled from dining financials to show the changes from between fall semester 2019 and fall semester 2020. I compiled menus and utilized data from Leanpath reports to chart differences in waste. Lastly, I asked student employees about their experiences and perceptions with the dining program.

### Fall 2019

| Monday Lunch at Ikenberry Dining hall |                            |                   |                                    |                      |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Don's Chophouse                       | Gregory St. Diner          | Penne Lane        | Soytainty                          | Hortensias           |
| Honey Dijon Chicken                   | Chicken Tenders            | Pasta Bar         | Zucchini Quinoa Lasagna            | Alto Tuna            |
| Italian sausage slider                | Cold Smoked Chicken Reuben | Marinara          | Spinach with Chickpeas and Lemon   | Bean Sprouts         |
| Sweet Potato Fries                    | Veggie Chicken Nuggets     | Meat Sauce        | vegan composed salad of the day    | Green Onions         |
| See Soy Menu                          | Sweet Potato Fries         | Meatballs         | Shaved Brussel Sprouts with Onions | Spring Mix           |
| See Soy Menu                          | See Soy Menu               | Whole Wheat Pasta | Fettucini                          | Wonton Chips         |
| 4" Hamburger Bun/slider bun           | Honey Mustard/BBQ/Ranch    | Garlic Bread      | Steamed Broccoli                   | Sticky Rice          |
|                                       |                            |                   | Brown Rice Smoked Red Beans        | Toasted Sesame Seeds |
|                                       |                            |                   |                                    | Deed Edgemo          |
|                                       |                            |                   |                                    | Deed Cucumber        |
|                                       |                            |                   |                                    | Shredded Carrots     |
|                                       |                            |                   |                                    | Pickled Radish       |
|                                       |                            |                   |                                    | Noni                 |
|                                       |                            |                   |                                    | Snackin Mayo         |
|                                       |                            |                   |                                    | Edamame              |
|                                       |                            |                   |                                    | Bottled Condiments   |
|                                       |                            |                   |                                    | Poke Bar             |

- 4-week menu cycles
- All halls unique menus
- Self-service All-you-care-to-eat

### Fall 2020

| Monday Lunch at all Locations        |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| HONEY APPLE CHICKEN BREAS            | HOT COFFEE & TEA POURED TO ORDER   |
| ITALIAN BEEF                         | TO GO BEV (2 PEP, 1 IS WATER)  |
| VEGAN CAPRISE SANDWICH               | SODA, WATER, TEA, JUICE, ELMORIDA  |
| ROASTED BROCCOLI                     | DESSERTS - LUNCH/DINNER  |
| CRINKLE CUT FRY                      | OATMEAL, RGN COOKIES, VEGAN BROWNIES   |
| LOCAL WHITE RICE                     | UNION REQUEST: CUTLERY, CHOPSTICKS, NAPKINS, TOGO BAG, STANDARD CONDIMENTS PCS |
| SOUP: BROCCOLI AND CHEESE RTU        |  |
| 4" ROSSINI ROLL, HAMBURGER BUN       |  |
| CUPPES/OTHER CONDIMENTS PEPPERONCINI |  |
| "PETITE" HMR SALADS:                 |  |
| TOSSED, CESAR, SPINACH, CHEF         |  |
| SEASONAL FRESH FRUIT CUP             |  |

- 3-week menu cycle
- All halls use the same menus to encourage students to eat where they live and not what is on the menu
- Added an express pickup station. Order ahead launched
- Everything served in disposable to-go containers with bottled beverages
  - 2 8" Clam shells, 1 side salad, 1 cup of soup, 1 water, 1 soda,/milk/juice, 1 fruit cup and/or hand fruit, 1 dessert,
- Safety and sanitation protocols remain.

## Data



- \$1,573,487 More spent in the Fall of FY21

| Date Range                                 | Total Amount of increase due to COVID |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| July 1 through November 30, 2020           |                                       |
| Summary Bottle & Paper Product             | 441,380.80                            |
| Gloves                                     | 24,868.70                             |
| Labor - through 11.27.20                   | 84,633.02                             |
| HMR Purchases that are not listed as COVID | 239,275.73                            |
| Total through November 30, 2020            | 790,158.25                            |

COVID relates expenses

| Top 5 Purchased Items FY19  | # of Cases | Extension Price | Top 5 Purchased Items YTD FY21        | # of Cases | Extension Price |
|-----------------------------|------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------|------------|-----------------|
| Chicken Breast              |            |                 | Cutlery Kit Plastic Knife Fork Spoon  | 1147       | \$92,172.23     |
| 4oz Halal                   | 5897       | \$389,950.86    | S&P                                   |            |                 |
| Chicken Wing                |            |                 | Chicken Breast                        |            |                 |
| Jumbo Halal                 | 1761       | \$167,921.74    | 4oz Halal                             | 1460       | \$90,803.48     |
| Cheese Mozz/Prov Mix        |            |                 | Bio Container Paper Hinged 3-Comp 8x8 | 3233       | \$79,681.13     |
| Shredded                    | 3455       | \$163,595.61    |                                       |            |                 |
| Chicken Breast Raw Julienne |            |                 | Pineapple Cubed                       | 10785      | \$42,729.75     |
| Strip                       | 3965       | \$142,745.31    | Precut                                |            |                 |
| Beef Strip Julienne         | 2098       | \$140,824.97    | Cheese Mozz/Prov Mix Shredded         | 965        | \$42,316.59     |

- Increase in paper goods, item costs, and amounts purchased, decrease in board income
- 43% decrease in meals consumed
  - Students not using all the meals that were purchased
  - Students taking as much food as will fit in the provided containers; avoid contact, comfort, hoarding.
- Out of stock items every day. Prime vendor has a 92% fill rate
  - No ETA on when items will be back in stock. Some items weeks or months out.

### Spring 2020

| Monday Lunch at Ikenberry Post COVID Shutdown |                        |                    |                                  |
|---|------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| Don's Chophouse                               | Gregory St. Diner      | Penne Lane         | Soytainty                        |
| Honey Dijon Chicken                           | Grilled Ham & Swiss    | Sliced Tomatoes    | Spinach with Chickpeas and Lemon |
| Sweet Potato Fries                            | Veggie Chicken Nuggets | Pickle Spears      | Steamed Broccoli                 |
| See Soy Menu                                  | Sweet Potato Fries     | Sliced Red Onions  |                                  |
| 4" Hamburger Bun                              | Meatballs              | Sliced Turkey      | Brown Rice                       |
|   | Meatballs              | Sliced Ham         | Smoked Red Beans                 |
|   | Meatballs              | Sliced Roast Beef  | Smoked Red Beans                 |
|   | Meatballs              | Sliced Salsas      | Smoked Red Beans                 |
|   | Meatballs              | Cheddar Swiss      | Smoked Red Beans                 |
|   | Meatballs              | American Proce     | Smoked Red Beans                 |
|   | Meatballs              | Noni               | Smoked Red Beans                 |
|   | Meatballs              | Snackin Mayo       | Smoked Red Beans                 |
|   | Meatballs              | Edamame            | Smoked Red Beans                 |
|   | Meatballs              | Bottled Condiments | Smoked Red Beans                 |
|   | Meatballs              | Poke Bar           | Smoked Red Beans                 |

- Hours of operation reduced; some venues closed
- Move to a 2-week menu cycle. All halls unique.
- Selections minimized
- All service lines will change the serving utensils to face the staff rather than the students. Utensils changed every 30 min. Touch points sanitized 1x/hr.
- Salad bars and deli lines reduced to two varieties of premade and wrapped sandwiches, two composed salad and packaged dressing, one soup available with disposable bowl and lid, wrapped desserts.
- Prepackaged cereal, Milk, and condiments
- Beverage stations turned full service
- No indoor dining
- Summer conferences canceled

- All location have a flow chart and arrows on the floor to direct one-way traffic and increase physical distancing.
- Staff zoning in prep/work stations
- No to limited indoor dining.

## Student Comments

The variety was better, and I loved hanging out with my friends. The theme meals were some of the highlights of the year.



With the limited seating available, I miss being able to hangout, eat, and study.



## Conclusions

- Flexibility is crucial
- Processes related to sanitation and safety will forever be changed
- Community is a part of customer service



Service style, use of more RTU and packaged items created less pre-consumer waste.