

Dining services changes could come from open forum

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By Michael Johnpoll

Vice President of Student Affairs Christopher Kandus-Fisher and Senior Director of Dining Services Paul Johnson held an open forum for students to voice concerns and solutions to the changes to Dining Services and the Commons on Sept. 11.

A Facebook group called 'It's my meals and I want them now' sprang up on Sept. 2 to more than 300 members almost overnight. Of these groups' members, approximately 50 were at the forum along with 20 more students who wanted to have a voice in how they are allowed to use meals.

A full list of student concerns was compiled and made available by Lindsey Bishop, Marketing Manager of Dining Services. Of the many comments made by students at the forum, some of the points that were addressed included restrictions during meal periods, student common area being taken away and the inability to share meals and cost.

### **Restrictions**

Currently, if a student is on any meal plan, there are four meal periods during which a single meal can be used. Meals cannot be shared.

Many at the forum pointed out that student schedules do not work this way and that these restrictions are interfering with the ability to eat when it works within a given schedule, forcing students off campus for food.

Some students, several at the forum, eat several smaller meals per day for medical purposes. To this and a number of issues, an idea came from the forum: inexpensive, takeaway bag lunches. Part of this idea came from students, part from Johnson himself.

### **Common Ground**

At the forum, a very large group of students seemed to say the same thing about the Commons' role as a common ground: It is called the Commons.

"The Commons is a place for communion," student Elizabeth Loudon said. "You make friends in the Commons, you make connections. Some people go there to do homework."

Johnson responded to the idea of common space by pointing to the back room of the Commons, sometimes called The Green Room.

“The idea behind that little room is to be open 24 hours a day for students, for faculty, for staff, to kinda give that little common area back,” Johnson said at the forum.

At this, there was a generally good reaction.

### **Meal Flexibility and Cost**

The last major concern among students was inflexibility to use meals and the cost to have that flexibility. In the official advertisement for the resident meal plans, the only factual information comes from the “make a plan page.” All meals must fit into the meal period schedule which is not provided on this document, but is available on the Dining Services website. The meal periods are 7-11 a.m., 11 a.m.-5 p.m., 5-7:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.-2:30 a.m.

Fisher pointed that out that if the university wasn’t listening to student concerns, then this forum would never have been held.

There is no word yet whether the school will go through with the student suggestions, but if it does, changes will likely be implemented in less than a month.