Report to the Institute

The Blue Ribbon Committee on Dining (BRC) was charged in October 2007 with examining the dining system at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. This report explains the committee’s process and research, and the committee’s resulting recommendations for changes to the dining program.

May 11, 2009
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Executive Summary

The Blue Ribbon Committee on Dining (BRC) was charged in October 2007 with examining the existing dining system at MIT, with a particular focus on the House Dining program. The charge tasked the committee with going beyond just looking at ways to provide food; the Committee was to consider the relationship between sound nutrition and learning ability, social engagement over meals, and ways to bring students together as part of a larger Institute family over dining.

From the charge and market research data, the Committee agreed that the dining program must offer choice, respect diversity, be open on a schedule that meets community needs, be affordable, support the educational mission, respect sustainable practices, and be responsive to (and able to evolve with) community needs. Recommendations submitted in this report are based on these concepts.

Highlights of those recommendations include:

- Support for abolishing the House Dining Membership (a discount program which is currently required for residents of houses with Dining Rooms) to be replaced with declining balance plans and Individualized Eating Plans designed to meet students’ varying needs;
- Suggestion that a centralized dining facility might better serve the needs of the community, as would expanded hours and better breakfast, weekend and late night offerings;
- Ways to better support students who choose to cook for themselves rather than using the dining program including offering cooking classes or grocery store gift cards on TechCASH;
- Suggestions for improving access to dining spaces, as well as ways to make those spaces more attractive, and to encourage more active and voluntary participation.

This report does not recommend removal of in-residence kitchens or the addition of a global mandatory meal plan. The Blue Ribbon Committee supports diversity on this campus in all forms, including diversity created by how individuals and communities choose to participate in meals.
The Blue Ribbon Committee collaborated with a consulting firm (Envision Strategies) who aided the committee in collecting market research and benchmarking against peer institutions. The Committee used data collected by Envision to inform this process. Envision has filed a separate report, or “Meal Plan Study,” which will be available with this report.
Introduction

Committee Formation and Charge

In the fall of 2007, the Division of Student Life at MIT convened the Blue Ribbon Committee on Dining (BRC). The Committee (comprised of students, faculty, and staff members selected to represent a variety of perspectives)\(^1\) was charged with examining the existing structure of the dining system and making recommendations for what the program should look like in years to come. Former Dean for Student Life, Larry G. Benedict’s\(^2\) charge stated, in part:

“The existing dining program at MIT is complex: it provides a lot of options, serves a number of constituents, and seeks to meet a variety of needs. The Blue Ribbon Committee on dining has been convened to examine that structure and to determine what the dining structure at MIT should look like in the years to come…”

“The purpose of a dining program is about more than just providing food. There is a nutritional aspect that recognizes the relationship between sound nutrition and learning ability, an aspect that encourages social engagement over meals, and a community-building aspect that says meals should bring students as participant of a larger Institute family, not just residents of one house or region of campus. Meals should promote a broader sense of community and break down stereotypes. They should also offer students an opportunity to interact with faculty in an informal learning environment.”\(^3\)

Dining System Prior to the Committee Charge

At the start of the Blue Ribbon Committee process (fall 2007), on-campus dining options included: four house dining rooms (in Baker, Simmons, McCormick and Next Houses); 18 café or retail locations\(^4\); two convenience stores; four food trucks; three pubs; delivery programs through off-campus vendors; and several specialty services including Kosher Shabbat meals on Friday nights, a weekly buffet service in MacGregor Hall and multiple catering vendors.\(^5\) None of the residential dining halls were open for breakfast or lunch. By the end of the process (spring 2009), a new house dining room in Ashdown (NW35), a new café operation (W98), a new food

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\(^1\) See Appendix B: Committee Membership
\(^2\) Retired, June 2008.
\(^3\) Appendix A: The Committee’s Charge
\(^4\) “Retail locations” refers to any campus café or restaurant that is not a convenience store and is not located in a residence.
\(^5\) “Catering” vendors deliver or serve food for events in locations that are not dining spaces, such as meeting rooms.
truck and a one-day-a-week fruit and vegetable stand were added. The McGregor weekly buffet was eliminated.

With the exception of students who live in a house with a dining room, there were no mandatory meal plans on campus. Students who live in a residence with a dining room participate in a “value-added” program known as House Dining Membership or Preferred Dining Membership. Under this plan, students pay a fee that supports House Dining operations, and in return they receive a 50% discount on dinners purchased at house dining halls. The amount of the fee is $300. It works for dinner meals in House Dining and at the Simmons Late Night Café; it does not work for breakfast or lunch. The plan is fairly unpopular with students and has low voluntary enrollment.

Most meals on campus are purchased with cash or one of the MIT debit accounts, which are TechCASH and Dining Dollars. TechCASH is a debit account, connected to an MIT ID card, which can be used for a variety of services both on- and off-campus. A Dining Dollars account is similar to TechCASH but may only be used for dining purchases. Neither of these programs requires a minimum commitment and neither provides a discount.

Students who live in on-campus residences without dining halls generally cook for themselves, purchase food from retail venues on- and off-campus, or engage in a combination of these behaviors. Students who live in a Fraternity, Sorority, or Independent Living Group (FSILG) participate in their organization’s meal program. These programs vary and are not affiliated with Campus Dining.

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6 Baker House Dining Report, 2007
7 In 2009, 95 percent of members were from mandatory enrollment.
8 An increased number of campus dining vendors started accepting credit and debit cards for purchases after the Blue Ribbon Committee process started.
The Changing Landscape

Financial Change
Benedict encouraged the committee to “think outside the box” and create a vision for an ideal dining program. He also encouraged the committee to think broadly without focusing too heavily on restrictions that could be created by financial implications or facility limitations. However, as the committee’s work progressed, circumstances both at MIT and with the global economy changed. In turn, this changed the committee’s feelings about project limitations. The committee chose to let the financial sustainability of MIT’s dining system influence some recommendations.

Facility Change
Construction on campus during the BRC process included building projects that would mean the opening of several dining facilities within a few years of the filing of this report including: a 350-seat facility in W1; a 200-seat facility in the Sloan School of Management (with 150 additional seats in Executive Education); and a 124-seat facility in the Koch Cancer Research Center (which will replace an existing café operation). The W1 project, as a residential community with dining, was of most interest to the committee.

Formerly Ashdown, W1 is a residential facility located at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Amherst Street. At the start of the BRC process, the building was closed for renovations that included plans for a large dining facility. The community’s dining program was to be determined by “The Phoenix Group,” a group of undergraduate students who plan to live in the building after renovations are complete. The Phoenix Group decided that the dining facility (which would be the largest on campus) should offer continuous All-You-Care-to-Eat (AYCE) service for breakfast, lunch and dinner. This group was not part of the BRC, but the committee did consider The Phoenix Group’s conclusions for its report.

In October 2008, the Institute informed The Phoenix Group that most of the building’s renovations would be postponed indefinitely due to budget cuts.9 Not knowing the definite opening date created challenges for the Blue Ribbon Committee in envisioning how some of the recommendations they would ultimately propose could be implemented.

9 Sankar, Ramya: “W1 Dorm Project Delayed as Funds Dry Up,” The Tech, October 21, 2008
Process Change

The Blue Ribbon Committee collaborated with Envision Strategies, a consulting company, throughout the process. As part of their responsibilities to the committee, Envision prepared a market research report and meal plan report. In January 2009, Envision sent a draft report with recommendations to Blue Ribbon Committee Chair Donna Denoncourt.

The report contained recommendations that Denoncourt felt the Committee could not or would not endorse. She planned to review the draft recommendations with the Committee to return to Envision for changes that would more accurately reflect the Committee’s vision but before the Committee had a chance to meet and review the report, a copy was released to the community.

Some recommendations in the Envision report received harsh critique, especially the recommendation that all students should be required to buy into a meal plan regardless of where they live. Students, parents and other community members opposed the global mandatory meal plan for several reasons: many objected philosophically to denying students choice when it came to their eating habits; some residential communities were concerned about losing traditions around communal meals; students who preferred to cook were concerned about losing access to kitchens; and many were concerned about the cost of the plan, which was comparable to other schools but considerably higher than what students were used to paying for food under the existing system.

The leaked report further cemented the Committee’s understanding of the importance that the MIT community places on choice, and the need to balance choice with goals such as financial sustainability and nutritional responsibility. It also led the committee to release some information prior to the release of this report, including a statement confirming that students who do not live in a residence with a house dining room would continue to have the option to cook, and would not be required to buy into a mandatory plan.

Finally, in response to calls for greater transparency, the committee took steps to share progress with the community including posting key documents and summaries of meeting notes online, and organizing community forums to solicit feedback on the Committee’s recommendations before the filing of the final report.
Research Process Summary

*Envision Strategies*, a firm specializing in “operational consulting and strategic planning for the hospitality industry,” 10 was selected by a committee independent of the BRC to serve as consultants on the project. Representatives from Envision Strategies met with the BRC during the first weeks of the process to determine appropriate data collection methods. The group decided on the following strategies:

- Conduct focus groups and interviews with various campus constituencies;
- Conduct a major on-campus survey designed to collect information on current habits and to better understand wants and needs for the future; and
- Review benchmarking data that compared MIT to other like institutions. Envision Strategies prepared the benchmarking report comparing MIT with schools selected by the committee based on factors such as academic rigor and campus setting.

The Committee recognized that they would need to understand more than just current habits in order to make recommendations at the end of the process; they would also need to consider why community members were choosing those habits, what other habits community members might consider with a different system in place and, also, what program aspects would be best for the community as a whole. In addition to questions about current practices, the survey included a series of “hypothetical questions” to help the committee understand how behaviors might change given different resources or opportunities.

Focus groups were designed to bring together groups of possibly like-minded people, such as “athletes,” or “students without dining.” These groups met with Envision Strategies consultants over a period of two days at the end of November 2007.

Committee members participated in the development of questions for the focus groups (moderated by Envision Strategies) and for the survey (conducted through a secure server by Envision Strategies). Community members were invited to participate in the survey over a three-week period (from April 10 until May 2, 2008). Nearly 4,000 community-members responded to the survey, of which about 46% were undergraduate students, 45% were grad students, and 9%

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were faculty. Staff, alumni and other community members were not included in the survey because it was designed largely to look at the residential system. The Blue Ribbon Committee received focus group data in spring 2008 and survey data in summer 2008.

Later in the process (spring 2009), the committee hosted community forums. Feedback from these forums was also considered in the final recommendations.

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11 Envision Strategies: MIT Meal Plan Study Revised Market Research Report, April 12, 2009, Sec/Pg. 1-1 and 1-2
Visioning and Key Themes

Using information collected from the focus groups and survey, along with committee discussions, the BRC identified several themes that appeared frequently, broadly defined by the following one- or two-word concepts:

- Choice
- Pricing/Affordability
- Location/Availability
- Quality/Program Structure
- Education/Community
- Sustainability
- Responsiveness/Evolution

The Committee recognized that many of the concepts had multiple definitions and worked to define them as they related to dining at MIT. Following a visioning exercise on the themes (conducted in October 2008) the Committee developed a series of statements to guide recommendations. Those statements, in order of importance, are as follows:

1. MIT is a diverse community; the system should recognize that diversity exists and plan for it.
2. Choice must be part of whatever system is selected. Programs must also be dynamic and able to be changed.
3. Dining options should ensure that economic considerations do not compromise student nutrition. As good nutrition aids better academic performance, the Institute should have a vested interest in ensuring that everyone is able to eat well regardless of his or her economic situation.
4. The program should offer meals that strike a balance between quality and price.
5. Food should be available on a schedule that matches customer schedules. Service availability should not be a barrier to using the system.
6. Opportunities need to exist to allow students to participate in the system. This must include programs that welcome and encourage continual feedback and input.
7. The Institute has a vested interest in building community around meals.

The following sections include discussion of the themes and statements outlined above, and how the committee used both to reach recommendations.
Diversity

MIT is a diverse community; the system should recognize that diversity exists and plan for it.

The MIT community is made up of people who have diverse preferences, needs, and schedules. MIT values cultural, religious and ethnic diversity. The Committee feels that food is an important element in diversity and believes that an effective dining program should support campus diversity, both by catering to dietary needs and by exposing the broader community to new cultural experiences.

Living Experiences

MIT provides a variety of living experiences for both graduate and undergraduate students on- and off-campus, in dormitories and in FSILGs. Students are given a choice when it comes to housing, and housing and dining decisions are often linked (nearly 60% of undergraduates surveyed indicated that dining played a role in their housing selection). The undergraduate respondents on-campus fell into three categories: 32% chose a residence hall because it had a dining room and they did not want to cook for themselves on a regular basis; 30% chose a residence hall because it did not have a dining room and they wanted to be able to cook for themselves on a regular basis; 20% chose a residence hall because it had a combination of kitchens and dining room and they wanted to be able to cook for themselves sometimes and eat in the dining room at others.\(^\text{12}\)

Sixty-one percent of the students in residences with a dining hall (81% of Baker residents) made their housing selection because they wanted a dining hall, while about 90% of East Campus residents, 90% of Bexley residents, 80% of Burton-Connor residents and 94% of Random Hall residents made their choice because of a desire to cook.

About 45% of MIT’s undergraduate population affiliates with an FSILG, most of which offer communal dining. Thirty-six percent reported choosing housing for a combination of dining and kitchen facilities, while 32% indicated that they did not want to cook.\(^\text{13}\) The large Greek and Independent Living Group population distinguishes MIT from most of its peer institutions and makes the global meal plans common at other universities more undesirable.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., Sec/Pg. 1-4  
\(^{13}\) Envision Strategies: MIT Meal Plan Study Market Research Report Appendix, April 12, 2009, table 9-1, pg. 25
Dietary Needs and Preferences

Students at MIT have a broad range of dietary needs, with some based on personal choice, others guided by religious beliefs or cultural heritage, and some by medical restrictions. Survey responses indicated that around 7% of the respondents identify their diet as vegetarian/vegan, 2% keep kosher or halal, and about 8% indicated that they preferred organic foods. Another 3% indicated that they had “other” special dietary preferences beyond those listed.\textsuperscript{14}

The dining system in place at the start of the BRC process included options such as vegetarian (and some vegan) dishes, halal foods, sustainable and local foods, and menus sensitive to allergies. Some other dietary needs, such as meal options for kosher diners, were not being met.

MIT should commit to ensuring that everyone on campus can both participate in the dining program and find a variety of foods within it. A diversity of offerings is necessary to meet the needs of the MIT community. The Dining office should actively solicit the opinions of various cultural/religious communities on campus as to how the program can best meet their needs.

Food Sources

Students at MIT have different preferences on how they choose to obtain food. Some want to find food in dining halls, some wish to stop for fast food or at food trucks and many wish to cook their own food.

A high percentage of survey respondents reported that they prepare their own dinner primarily because it is less expensive (82%).\textsuperscript{15} Others favored it because they enjoyed cooking or saw it as a social activity (51% of those in non-dining hall dorms, versus 29% in dining hall dorms).\textsuperscript{16} Survey data seemed to suggest that some students will want to prepare their own food no matter what meal plan price points are offered, but these students should still be given access (and the option) to participate in dining programs on campus.

The weekly produce market should be maintained to give students who prefer to cook easy access to a wide range of fresh, cheap, high quality fruits and vegetables. Grocery shuttles

\textsuperscript{14} Envision Strategies: MIT Meal Plan Study Revised Market Research Report, April 12, 2009, Sec/Pg.1-6
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, Sec/Pg.1-20
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, Sec/Pg.1-24
should be continued and expanded to help students obtain meat, fish, grains, dairy products and other essential food items not available at the produce market.

**Scheduling Needs**

MIT students have varying schedules and diverse scheduling needs. Practice and match or game schedules can make it difficult for athletes to use the dining halls because of the halls limited hours of operation. Nearly 18% of students in dining hall dorms report prepare their own dinner on occasion because of the operating hours of the dining hall.\(^{17}\) Survey results indicated a strong interest in breakfast and late night options with undergraduates showing the most support for these options.\(^{18}\) Some want breakfast first thing in the morning before classes (respondents reported eating breakfast at home before 10 AM three to four times a week\(^ {19}\)), while others want breakfast options later in the day. Establishing a dining hall with longer hours and continuous operation should be explored once W1 opens.

\(^{17}\) Ibid, Sec/Pg. 1-24

\(^{18}\) Ibid, Sec/Pgs. 1-55 and 1-56

\(^{19}\) Ibid, Sec/Pg. 1-12
Choice

Choice must be part of whatever system is chosen.
The program must also be dynamic and able to be changed.

“Choice,” as a concept, appeared repeatedly in BRC research, visioning exercises, and feedback received from the community. Individuals and residential communities at MIT valued having the ability to choose their dining experience. As with “diversity,” the committee found several ways to define “choice” as it related to the dining program.

Choosing to Participate

In discussing meal plans, two fundamental questions are who participates (and, consequently, who does not) and who makes the decision as to participation (as in, does the student decide or does the institution). Many of MIT’s peer institutions, including Harvard, Yale, Stanford and CalTech, require all residential students to buy into a meal plan. Others, including Columbia, UPenn and Carnegie Mellon, require only freshmen to buy into plans20.

Mandatory plans can provide an institution with consistent income, which can help dining programs to better plan for, and provide, consistent services. For students, plans that require a committed amount for food can help ensure that a student’s ability to consume regular, nutritious meals is not limited by his or her financial resources.

Faculty and student survey respondents agreed, “broader commitments to dining services are justified if it results in lower average costs and better access to services for all students.” However, only about 18% agreed, “all students should participate in some kind of meal plan.” On the survey, the following statements received almost universally negative responses:

• “Freshmen should participate in a campus meal plan.”
• “Students that live in residences without dining halls should commit to a meal plan for some of their meals.”
• “Students living in a house with a dining hall should be required to have a meal plan commitment.”
• “It is important to commit to dining together.”

20 Envision Strategies: MIT Meal Plan Study Market Research Report Appendix, April 12, 2009, Sec/Pg. E1-E8
The following statement received almost universally positive responses:

- “The cost for a house dining program should only be supported by those who choose to participate in its meal plan program and not by the whole campus community."21"

One of the greatest challenges the Committee faced was balancing the need for financial sustainability and nutritional responsibility with the desire for individuals and individual living communities to make their own choices about dining. An individual’s right to choose his or her dining options was important to most survey takers and focus group participants and was, therefore, important to the Committee.

The BRC does not endorse mandatory plans for the entire campus, but does endorse commitments for students who live in residences with dining because their choice of housing represents a choice to join a community that participates in dining. The Committee believes that a world-class dining program would have a high voluntary enrollment rate, and that an increase in the available options in the dining program would also lead to increased enrollment. In almost all surveyed populations, there would be an increase in participation if a “more ideal” program existed.22 Therefore, choice will be an integral part of any successful program.

**Choosing Program Options**

Data indicated that undergraduates who primarily cook their own meals feel that this is an integral part of their residence’s culture. Of students in residences with dining halls, 44-60% said that the dining halls were “somewhat significant” in their decision to live there, while 13-24% said they were “extremely significant.” Of students in residences without dining programs, 17-42% said dining options were “somewhat significant” and 10-31% said “extremely significant”23.

Students were split fairly evenly between those who preferred to have meals prepared for them and those who preferred to cook regularly, suggesting that the dining program should continue to offer support for both cultures. Students who use dining programs (or thought they might) were also split in their opinions about whether MIT should offer All-You-Care-To-Eat (AYCE)

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21 Ibid sec/ps. 1-39
meals or \textit{a la Carte}. Survey responses were positive to the question of whether MIT should add an AYCE option, however to the question if MIT should replace all existing House options with AYCE, the undergraduate responses were negative,\textsuperscript{24} suggesting the dining program should offer a mix of these options.

\textbf{Choosing Types of Food, Locations, and Meal Times}

The rigors of academic life at MIT often force students to keep unusual schedules or travel to parts of campus far from their residences. In focus groups, students said that one of their main concerns about meal plans is the potential for being "locked in" to one dining venue since schedules virtually guarantee that most students will not be in the same location at the same time everyday.\textsuperscript{25}

MIT students need choices of venues in different parts of campus that are open during a wide range of hours. With the exception of lunchtime during the academic week, students are not concentrated in one area of campus at meal times. At dinnertime, large portions of the population report that they are not near their residence.\textsuperscript{26} When asked where they would prefer to see a new sit-down location, students were split between zones 2 and 3 (see Appendix C for definitions of “zones”).\textsuperscript{27} Between the hours of 4:00 PM and 10:00 PM, 44\% of graduate students are in zone 3, while only 25\% of undergraduates are in that zone.\textsuperscript{28}

Students want food options to be available during all time periods. Undergraduates living on campus would like to have more breakfast options on campus. Many students showed preference for a hot breakfast (which, traditionally, means hot foods such as eggs, pancakes, breakfast meats or oatmeal) and for an AYCE venue that is not in a residence hall.\textsuperscript{29} Many students responded positively to the idea of a breakfast option in their residence. In particular, residents of houses with dining halls show significant interest in breakfast.\textsuperscript{30} Students also showed strong support for a central sit-down dining facility on the main campus or west campus, with undergraduates showing especially strong support for west campus. About 22\% of students said they would use such a facility for breakfast and about 27\% said they would use it

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid, sec/pg. 1-48
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, sec/pg. 2-3
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, sec/pg. 1-9
\textsuperscript{27} Envision Strategies: MIT Meal Plan Study Market Research Report Appendix, April 12, 2009, table 69-1, pg. 182
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., sec/pg. 1-9
\textsuperscript{29} Envision Strategies: MIT Meal Plan Study Revised Market Research Report, April 12, 2009, sec/pg. 1-56
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, sec/pg. 1-43
late at night. Student focus group participants, athletes in particular, showed strong interest in later dining options, until at least 9:00 PM.

Regarding types of food (as was discussed in the “Diversity” section), focus group and survey participants requested a wider selection of healthy, locally grown, vegetarian, kosher, and/or organic options on campus. The Committee believes that the system should include these options throughout the schedule and in multiple locations.
Nutrition

Dining options should ensure that economic considerations do not compromise student nutrition. As good nutrition aids better academic performance, the Institute should have a vested interest in ensuring that everyone is able to eat well regardless of his or her economic situation.

The Massachusetts Department of Education has taken the following position on nutrition and academics: “As schools reshape themselves to meet the educational needs of students in the 21st century, they need to recognize their role in health promotion in general and nutritional health in particular. Knowledge gained about school-based nutrition interventions over the past 15 years justifies the importance of school programs and services aimed at improving nutritional health.”

Survey data suggested that unhealthy eating is a problem at MIT. Students report having “good intentions but poor actions.” That is to say, they desire to eat healthy but feel they are unable to do so. The survey asked respondents to report on their own perceptions of their nutritional habits. The results indicated that less than 20% of undergraduates and 30% of graduate students believed that they consumed a balanced diet on a regular basis. In addition, only 12.5% of the student respondents reported that they eat at least one “healthy” meal a day.

Research indicates that proper nutrition is vital to good academic performance and the results of the survey left the committee concerned.

While there may be many reasons that students’ diets are not as healthy as they could be, the BRC found that cost and schedule conflicts were the most prominent. The Committee was particularly concerned with the idea that cost was a barrier. In focus groups, students said they would like to eat healthy meals but are limited by what they can afford. Many expressed concern about the prices at on-campus retail venues, and some believed that MIT viewed dining as a revenue source rather than a service.

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31 Massachusetts Department of Education: Position Statement on Nutrition Programs and Services in School (see http://www.doe.mass.edu/cnp/position.html)
32 Envision Strategies: MIT Meal Plan Study Final Report, April 12, 2009, pg. 2
Quality and Price Relationship

The program should offer meals that strike a balance between quality and price.

Members of the MIT Community want to recognize “value” when purchasing meals. Value, too, is difficult to define because it is often based on perception. The Committee chose the word “affordable” to refer to perceived value rather than a specific price point, and determined that an appropriate value definition was to say that meals should strike a balance between quality and price.

There are many ways to get an inexpensive meal on or around campus. The Committee assumed (and focus group participants initially confirmed) that students look for “free food” as a source of meals. One participant stated that free food events “generally provide unhealthy options,” but students choose to use them because, as another participant commented, there is “social pressure to consume free food.” 33 Consultants reported leaving the focus groups with the impression that this was a widely used practice; however, survey data later indicated that the behavior is not as prevalent as the focus groups suggested. 34

Survey respondents cited cooking as a way to save money. Between 80 and 90% of undergraduate students who cooked cited lower cost as the reason they chose to prepare their own breakfast and/or dinner. The exception was among students with House Dining Memberships, where only about 65% cited cost. Of students with House Dining memberships who chose to cook meals, 65% said they cooked their own dinner because they “disliked the food served.” 35

Regarding meal purchasing, students participating in focus groups reported that they felt they could not afford to eat well or did not want to spend what little money they had on food. As long as self-budgeting is the norm for meal purchases, students will likely tend toward inexpensive meal options. This can mean that the options chosen are not as healthy.

33 Envision Strategies: MIT Meal Plan Study Revised Market Research Report, April 12, 2009, sec/pg:2-1 through 2-3
The Committee also recognized that many students who received financial aid packages with board included were not spending these funds solely on food. Consultants shared that some students acknowledged sending food money from financial aid home to support their families. Some students were also observed (or acknowledged) using money intended for food as discretionary money for non-food items such as computers.

Early in the process the Committee discussed creating plans that would ensure that money would be set aside for food purchases (either for groceries or for purchases in dining venues) as a way to help change behaviors like those described above. Ultimately, the committee decided that this would be impossible to implement without calling for mandatory campus-wide plans. The Committee does not endorse the idea of global mandatory plans because of the possible negative effects on individual community cultures and on student budgets.

The “recommendations” section of this report includes suggestions from the Committee for meal purchasing plans.
Scheduling and Service Availability

Food should be available on a schedule that matches customer schedules. Service availability should not be a barrier to using the system.

It is important that the dining program include locations that are open and accessible for all meal periods, both in houses and elsewhere on campus. The dining program could be enhanced by the addition of locations (or addition of service hours to existing locations) in areas of campus where service is not available.

A key area of the availability discussion included adding AYCE options and more breakfast and late night options, as well as increasing dinner coverage to accommodate athletes and those who return to dorms later in the evening. A secondary area was discussion around removing existing barriers to using the program. Through the survey, the Committee found that members of the MIT Community felt that intangible elements such as scheduling (class, athletics, etc.) and actual physical barriers such as entry desks in unfamiliar halls created barriers to access. Survey respondents asked if they felt comfortable going to “any dining location” gave generally negative responses, some cited discomfort in accessing halls where they do not live.  

Breakfast

Breakfast service was an area where options improved while the Committee was working on this process. Sit-down hot breakfast options opened in both Central Campus (Forbes Family Café, Stata, fall 2008) and West Campus (Cambridge Grill, W20, spring 2009) after the BRC survey was completed. Despite these additions, House Dining locations still did not offer breakfast service. This is an area where the committee sees room for growth. Baker was discussed as a possible location (should the Baker community be open to hosting the service) because of its location and proximity to central campus. The data also showed some support for an AYCE breakfast or weekend brunch service in a central location.

Extended Evening and Late Night Hours

Most dining halls operate three hours a day, five days a week. Baker Dining is an exception with seven-day a week operation. Some students, especially athletes, report finding it difficult to eat during the hours when House Dining Rooms operate due to conflicting schedules. One student

36 Ibid., sec/pgs. 3-41 and 3-42
committee member stated that “options for hot meals after dining halls close are almost non-existent.” In order to provide students with the healthy fuel they need to remain productive during late study hours the Committee discussed looking at better ways to provide late night options. Currently, many students use off-campus food sources (such as campusfood.com) for evening and late night meals.

**Residence Hall Security**

Hall security is a concern. Residential communities that play host to dining programs are currently open to all students and faculty during dining hours. This effectively opens the whole building (not just the dining room) to visitors during dining hours. The committee feels that the residential communities and those who wish to access dining but do not live in the hall where the dining room is located could be better served by creating outside entrances to dining spaces. This would help to secure the residences and might help to break down some of the perceived barriers to entry.

**All-You-Care-to-Eat Option**

Nearly half of all students surveyed (49.2%)\(^{37}\) think MIT should have some kind of AYCE option. Eventually W1 will offer AYCE service, but it is unclear at the time of this report when that building would re-open. If one of the existing communities would be amenable to the service change, this could help respond to requests for this service in the meantime.

**Central Facility (Long-Term)**

According to the survey, many students are on-campus away from their residence halls during lunch and dinner hours. The survey showed support for the addition of a centrally located dining facility in the survey’s zone 2 or 3, somewhere around building 10. A large central facility could better serve the entire MIT community. In the current program the most central location (Café 4) is too small to handle all of the potential demand, it is also closed in the evenings and on weekends.

\(^{37}\) Ibid, sec/pg. 1-47
Feedback and Input

Opportunities need to exist to allow students to participate in the system and be a part of the system. This must include programs that welcome and encourage continual feedback and input.

The BRC recognizes that a successful program should be open to assessment and constant feedback; a dynamic, transparent program that encourages constituent input will be key to ongoing success in the program. Regular feedback should be about the program more than the structure. Structural reviews should be done on a more infrequent basis.

The dining program needs to reflect the evolving needs of the MIT community. These needs should be monitored in several ways: an online suggestion box to provide continual feedback from a wide spectrum of users, regular consultations between the MIT dining office and various committees with high student involvement, and periodic surveys of the community. Dorms with dining programs should poll their residents and/or hold town hall meetings to determine satisfaction with the program and solicit suggestions. The Committee feels that communities should always be consulted before major programmatic or systemic changes occur.

The Campus Dining Advisory Board (CDAB) is an advisory body to the Campus Dining Office. There are seats on the board for undergraduate and graduate students from residences, clubs and associations across the Institute. Additionally, there is a Dining Committee associated with the Undergraduate Association and many dorm governments have dining officers or committees. These bodies should continue to have high representation from students and should look to involve those students in decisions regarding the dining program wherever possible. To allow students who are not on the board to participate in decision-making, open meetings should be held on a periodic basis.

Options should exist within the system to allow all interested students to participate in the program. For halls with dining rooms this means continuing to encourage active participation from dining chairs and house government, but might also mean inviting students from residences without dining rooms to participate in dining committees in other residences, if they have an interest in doing so. The committee also endorses the idea of forming small groups to look at specific issues related to dining.
Note that the Committee feels that programmatic elements should be dynamic but structural changes should be properly vetted before implementation. This clarification is a matter of cost and practicality. To review programmatic elements, a group can be convened every three years (to have some overlap with a student's lifetime at MIT) to evaluate the program.
Community-Building

The Institute has a vested interest in building community around meals.

In the online survey students living on campus were asked whether meals are an important part of the residential life experience. The average response was a 3.92 on a five-point scale where “5” indicated strong agreement. For graduate students living on-campus, the average response to the same question was 4.16. 38

Many of the Committee’s final recommendations lend themselves to community building. It is important to ensure that this idea remains in the forefront when the Institute makes decisions concerning the dining program. Whether a student is eating a meal in a House Dining Room or retail location or cooking a meal at home, it is very likely that other students will be around participating in the same behavior. In this regard, community building has the potential to occur at any meal.

Undergraduates at MIT tend to have strong ties to their living community but the Committee feels that ties to the campus-wide MIT Community are not as strong as they are at many other universities. Undergraduate survey respondents believed that it is important for the dining program to build community around meals, rating the statement “MIT should have a global meal plan that strives to build community campus-wide” at an average of 3.75 on the five-point scale. 39 While this was not enough to justify global plan commitments, the Committee felt that offering locations where the community could dine together could help to facilitate more interaction and help foster campus-wide community.

The Committee endorses the idea of creating a larger centralized dining facility (preferably AYCE) somewhere in the middle of campus, which would be conveniently accessible to undergrads from many living groups. With an AYCE facility, take-out options are usually fairly limited so diners are encouraged to sit in the dining hall while they eat. This will naturally cause more students to be in the dining hall together, which would create a more lively and inviting environment in the hall. Even if students sit in clusters with close friends, the hall would provide the setting for more students to interact on a more regular basis.

38 Envision Strategies: MIT Meal Plan Study Market Research Report Appendix, April 12, 2009, table 61-1, pg. 141
39 Ibid, table 65-1, pg. 147
Sustainability

“Some believe that adopting a sustainable approach means increasing recycling, reducing waste, and selecting ‘green’ products. While these are important steps, they fail to address the fundamental problems. Ecosystems do not, and cannot, expand their life-sustaining capacities in response to the expanding desires of cultures or exploding global populations. We must, instead, look within ourselves as we move towards a sustainable life.”  

The BRC agreed that any new dining program must be both financially and environmentally sustainable. “Sustainable,” like so many other concepts introduced in this report, has multiple definitions. As we discussed possible definitions of a “sustainable dining program” it became apparent that the description was not a thing but rather a process made up of a set of guiding values or principles.

Most sustainable efforts focus on three components, environmental, economic and social, and their interconnectedness. A key BRC theme is the impact of dining on the community. In light of this, the remainder of this section is focused on the economic and environmental components.

Financial Sustainability
The Committee agreed that any new dining program should be financially sustainable, or more appropriately stated, “financially viable.” The committee discussed the idea of looking to have the Institute subsidize portions of or the entire dining program but acknowledges that any subsidy coming from the Institute would reduce funding for other programs or initiatives.

Currently, the retail and catering programs help to subsidize the House Dining program. Conceptually, the committee felt this was an acceptable practice but realized that continuing this practice without creating a reserve fund could prevent capital renewal of the retail outlets. The ability to continue robust and successful retail and catering operations depends upon continual reinvestment in facilities and infrastructure.

The BRC agreed that the reliance on customer funds to maintain the dining program would promote innovation and foster a competitive spirit to attract and retain customers. Still, if retail

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revenues decline at any point, it would have a domino effect by reducing the subsidy to house dining, thus jeopardizing the entire structure of the dining program.

**Environmental Sustainability**

“...We seek to develop in each member of the MIT community the ability and passion to work wisely, creatively, and effectively for the betterment of humankind.”

MIT strives to better the world through academics and research, and is also working to “walk the talk” when it comes to sustainable campus operations. The greeningMIT program, a product of the MIT Energy Initiative’s Campus Energy Task Force, is focused on engaging the entire MIT community in taking action to make our campus more sustainable.

The BRC fully supports the mission of the sustainability@mit program and recommends that all vendors contracted with MIT Campus Dining be required to provide a sustainability plan. We do not recommend a blanket sustainability program for all vendors because, due to their size, not all vendors will have the same resources. Still, each vendor should be required to provide sustainability options at a level appropriate for their size and resources. Each sustainability plan should be reviewed, negotiated and approved as part of the contractual process required for becoming (or staying) a Campus Dining vendor.

The BRC suggests each plan include;

- **Sustainable Purchasing**
  - Source food products locally
  - Focus on organically-grown products
  - Prioritize fair-trade and humane products

- **Conservation Efforts**
  - Arrange composting of kitchen and post-user food waste
  - Provide for and encourage recycling by vendor and customers
  - Implement food waste reduction efforts
  - Identify ways to conserve water and energy

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42 Sustainability@mit, [http://sustainability.mit.edu/projects/campus](http://sustainability.mit.edu/projects/campus)
• Sustainability Education
  o Develop campaigns to reduce consumer waste (take less, waste less, etc.)
  o Discourage the utilization of non-recyclable and non-compostable dining containers, utensils, dishes, cups, etc.

The BRC also recommends that the Institute explore a holistic approach for sustainable dining efforts in light of the number of different vendors on campus. As an example, Lobdell (the food court in the Stratton Student Center) has four vendors but no central recycling or composting initiative for customers. Vendors have control over their sustainable efforts from the counter to the back of the house but no central coordination once the food is taken from the counter.
Education

The dining program at MIT should contribute to the Institute’s educational mission through food-related education and academic programs. The dining system facilitates education by providing appropriate spaces, event support and assistance, but the staff should be directly utilized in areas where they possess a unique skill set, such as leading cooking classes. Classes were a program element suggested by focus group participants.

Space Planning

In designing dining facilities, special consideration should be given to facilities that can also serve as instructional spaces. This could include kitchen spaces for instructional use, as well as seating and meeting spaces. Consideration should be given to instructor-led classes and seminars, informal student-faculty meals and cooking classes.

Facilitation

Campus Dining should work with other groups and departments on campus to meet educational objectives. The Campus Dining office should provide a clear system for reserving space in their facilities, assistance in advertising educational events and catering services. Dining should also continue to work with the health and wellness educators, like those at MIT Medical, in implementing an educational strategy around nutrition. The Committee also envisions collaboration with the other areas of Residential Life such as the house teams (housemasters and GRTs) and student groups.

Cooking Classes

Campus Dining should provide cooking classes as a way to enrich the MIT educational experience. Such classes would fit particularly well into the diversity of offerings during IAP, but could also be offered during other periods if demand exists. A variety of classes should be offered to meet the diverse dietary preferences and level of experience of the student population. The emphasis of these classes is expected to be on cooking skills that can be applied in the dormitory environment, but also on valuable life skills that can be applied post-graduation. The classes should include a nutritional aspect.
Recommendations

The Blue Ribbon Committee considered many possible recommendations for improvements or changes to MIT’s Dining system. The recommendations that the committee felt were strongest were released in draft reports to the community and were discussed in the Committee’s final meetings. The Committee ultimately put the recommendations that had gone to the community to a vote. The Committee chose to vote using an online tool to allow those who could not make final meetings to participate in voting for or against specific recommendations.

Committee members were given the opportunity to consider each recommendation on its own, rather than all recommendations as a group. Some lengthy recommendations were broken down so that the committee could choose to support or reject certain elements. For a recommendation to pass, it had to receive 75% of the committee vote. Recommendations that received at least 75% are included in this section as the Committee’s “Final Recommendations.” Recommendations that the committee considered but did not pass are included in Appendix E of this report, which begins on page 48.

Final Recommendations

Recommendations Relating to Meal Plans

The Committee believes that creating attractive spaces where the community can eat together on campus can play a big role in creating community connections. The meal plans below are primarily intended for undergraduates but inviting graduate students, faculty members and staff to participate in dining programs and plans, is strongly encouraged.

1. **Eliminate House Dining Membership and create declining balance meal purchasing accounts.**
   Part of the driving force behind the formation of the Blue Ribbon Committee was to address the shortcomings of the current House Dining Membership “discount” plan. This membership and the requirements associated with it have been in place for nearly five years. In this time it has proved to be ineffective; most students do not consider it to be a “good value,” it has not provided sufficient financial support for operations, and it has not worked to build greater community through increased student patronage.
House Dining Membership requires members to invest a $300 per semester fee and then use additional funds for meals (purchased at a 50% discount). Theoretically, under the current system this means participants must spend a total of $600 per semester in order to recover the cost of their fee. However, like other membership programs, the tracking of this is not transparent and students must determine for themselves whether they are realizing the full benefit of their membership. By converting the spending commitment above to a declining balance plan dedicated to House Dining purchases, the Committee expects:

- Greater transparency and understanding of plan use by students. Students will know exactly how much money that have committed to the House Dining program and how much they have and should use over the course of a semester.

- Menu pricing to be straightforward and market driven to appeal to both students required to participate in House Dining meal plans AND to attract voluntary meal plan participation as well as occasional diners.

- Pricing can be varied more broadly, appealing to a broader range of patrons because entrée prices are not restricted to fit estimates on which House Dining Membership is based ($8 per entrée, or $4 per discounted meal, for 75 meals which is used to calculate the current $300 membership fee). This flexibility extends to the purchase of additional meals or snacks that might be purchased at dinner for late evening.

- The new plan will provide greater predictability of patronage and support than the current system. By knowing that each student is supporting the system with a certain amount of money over a finite time frame, the operation’s management is able to forecast its preparation more accurately, reducing waste to keep costs down and to invest employee work hours in preparing the variety of items students desire, rather than in preparing too much of a particular menu item.

- From a community perspective, the benefits of greater and stable patronage are clear. What also is gained is that students can now use their plans to purchase meals for guests, broadening the appeal and engagement of the community. Meal discounts are currently restricted to the student House Dining Member and cannot be extended to guests. This restriction would be eliminated and students could use their balance to purchase meals for friends, visiting parents, or other guests.
The plan will begin to help cover operating deficits related to the House Dining system. In doing so, resources over time will be created to reinvest in facilities and new services in House Dining and in other aspects of the Campus Dining program.

2. Offer multiple Individualized Eating Plans

Survey participants felt, and the Committee agreed, that those who use the dining program should support it. We recommend continuing the current requirement for residents of dorms with dining halls to commit to a meal plan. The Committee recognizes that the plans offered must meet the needs of the students who are required to participate and should also attract voluntary participation from other community-members.

In a spring 2009 survey conducted by the Undergraduate Association, food quality, facility cleanliness and staff friendliness were all given positive ratings by students who use House Dining. Still, students did not consider the overall program to be “a good value.” The Committee believes that the best strategy for increasing the perception that the program is a good value is to provide a variety of plans that individuals can choose based on their own needs through programs called “Individualized Eating Plans” or IEPs. The Committee recommends that students choose an IEP at the same time they choose their housing giving students the Residential Exploration (REX) period to explore their eating needs as they explore their residential preferences.

A housemaster who attended one of the committee’s community forums (spring 2009) showed support for the idea, suggesting that this would invite students and parents to have deeper conversations about dining and how the student would be eating before he or she arrived on campus.

To help ensure the program is financially viable, the price of an IEP should be enough to cover the cost of service, labor, utilities and other fixed/variable expenses, and should help to balance food quality and choice. Based on students’ desire for breakfast and late night meals, some plans should be offered that cover these meal periods.

43 According to surveys conducted by the UA Dining Committee in spring 2009.
Approximately 50% of the undergraduates surveyed expressed a desire for some plan configuration that offers AYCE meals, so IEPs should include plans with a varying numbers of meals and options for AYCE as well as a la Carte locations. At least one, but no more than two dining halls should offer AYCE facilities. Pricing should be based on the cost of an AYCE meal, while noting that a la carte options would potentially provide more meals. Plans that are priced higher would offer a lower cost per meal.

**Example IEP Options**
The numbers given in the following examples are for demonstrative purposes. In voting, the Committee supported the idea behind IEPs, but felt that $600 was “too high” for the baseline cost. The Committee unanimously supported the idea that IEPs with a higher buy-in level should offer more value, as illustrated below.

- **IEP Option 1 (minimum requirement for students in a residence with dining)**
  - Approximately $600 per semester with dinner at $10.00 per meal
  - 4 AYCE dinners per week (4 to 5 a la carte)

- **IEP Option 2**
  - Approximately $915 per semester with dinner at $9.50 per meal; breakfast at $4.50 per meal
  - 5 AYCE dinners per week (5 to 6 a la carte)
  - 3 AYCE breakfasts per week (3 to 5 a la carte)

- **IEP Option 3**
  - Approximately $1,245 with dinner at $9.00 per meal and breakfast at $4.00 per meal
  - 7 AYCE dinners per week
  - 5 AYCE breakfasts per week (5 to 7 a la carte)

- **Late-Night Add-On Option**
  - Approximately $200 per semester
  - Offers declining balance for late night purchases

- **Supplemental Add-on Option**
  - At any point in the semester students who have purchased plans may choose to

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44 Envision Strategies: MIT Meal Plan Study Revised Market Research Report, April 12, 2009, pg. 1-47
add funds (to be used in dining locations) in increments that provide slightly more value than their cost. For example, an added bonus of two percent would give a student who deposits $50 to his or her account, $51 to spend.

3. **Offer IAP Plans.**

Introduce an IAP meal plan to ensure that students who are on campus for IAP are covered for all IAP meal periods. Participants would have the option of rolling leftover balance from their fall semester meal plan into their IAP plan.

4. **Create attractive IEPs and programs for FSILG-members, graduate students, and faculty/staff.**

IEPs should be flexible and attractive enough to encourage a variety of community members to buy into plans and eat in the dining halls. This would provide a way for the MIT Community to eat meals on the main campus without having to pack or eat fast food. In addition to IEP’s, provide opportunities such as a faculty/student lunch program that offers free meals to participants who bring faculty into dining halls.

The BRC acknowledges certain limitations with the IEP suggestion and recommends that the Campus Dining office and dining committees remain aware of these as the system evolves:

- First, the Committee acknowledges that the price of an IEP does add to the cost of living in a dorm with a dining hall, which could encourage students who are trying to be sensitive about spending to choose a residence based on price rather than cultural compatibility.

- Second, the Committee acknowledges that McCormick is currently the only all female residence on campus, because this is the case there may be women who choose to live in this hall that are not interested in participating in a dining program. The McCormick Hall house government should be involved in determining the best way to balance concerns and individual preferences with the need to support the community’s dining program.
**Recommendations Relating to Service**

1. **Offer a weekend brunch service.**

   On-campus hot breakfast service is limited on the weekend. Offer a hot meal service from late morning to early afternoon in at least one of the dining halls. This should be available to both those with a meal plan such as an IEP, and for walk-in service.

2. **Provide continuous service at W1 once the program opens.**

   The Committee supports the Phoenix Group’s decision to offer continuous meal service in W1. Student schedules vary greatly, offering a program that is available from early in the morning until late in the evening in a building as central as W1 might improve students’ chances of making it into a dining hall for any and all meal periods. Additionally, entrées (not just sandwiches or grab-and-go items) should be available into the evening to accommodate students with schedule restrictions, like athletes.

3. **Offer All-You-Care-to-Eat meals in at least one central location.**

   Survey respondents showed support for AYCE meal service, it should be offered in at least one location for breakfast, lunch and dinner. The existing AYCE dinner program in Ashdown should be promoted to all undergraduate students (the program already welcomes many graduate students on a nightly basis). An AYCE plan is expected in W1 when it is completed, but until it is available the Ashdown program should be heavily promoted or the service should be moved to a more central location.

4. **Include more vegetarian, vegan, sustainable/local, Kosher and allergy-sensitive foods in campus venues. If necessary create a venue or services that cater to community members with these needs.**

**Recommendations Relating to Meal Periods**

1. **Offer weekday breakfast service in House Dining locations or another central location on campus.**

   Survey participants with House Dining Membership indicated that they would eat most, if not all, breakfast meals in campus dining facilities if it were included with their membership. There was a slightly stronger preference for a hot breakfast over an open
pantry or grab-and-go program. MIT should work to establish more comprehensive breakfast options across campus in order to increase the portion of MIT students who eat breakfast and promote good nutrition and healthy habits.

Until W1 opens, the Committee endorses Baker House as the best breakfast location, pending approval from the Baker Community. The possibility of breakfast “kiosks,” located in other residences should also be explored. Ideally, a kiosk would require only one staff-member to operate. It would provide primarily grab-and-go options or some limited hot breakfast options.

### 2. Improve evening and late night offerings.

The student center offers service in some locations late into the evening; dining halls are open until 8 PM, 8:30 PM or 9:00 PM depending on the location and day of the week; Pacific Java (in Simmons) is open until 1 AM; and Macgregor Convenience and LaVerde’s Market are open until 3 AM some nights. MIT students, however, are awake later than most operations serve. The Committee endorses investigating other late night options, preferably with delivery, to help meet the needs of students seeking meals later into the evening.

**Recommendations to Support Students Who Cook a Majority of Their Meals**

The BRC recognizes that kitchens in dorms are an important part of MIT’s student life and dining, and should be fully supported through regular maintenance and renovation. Cooking should also be supported through initiatives like shopping shuttles and the produce stand and through cooking and nutrition classes.

The Committee recognizes that maintenance of kitchens-in-residence falls under the purview of MIT Housing, but endorses setting a minimum standard for kitchen quality and up-keep.

1. **Offer gift cards that can be purchased with TechCASH for grocery stores through vending machines on campus.**

   The committee supports the idea that students who plan to cook should be able to purchase groceries with TechCASH, but also recognizes that it isn’t practical to include

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46 Ibid, sec/pg. 1-10
all area grocery stores on TechCASH. We recommend that gift cards for the grocery stores closest to campus be sold on campus, preferably via vending machines that accept TechCASH. Ideally, this will help students to maintain a committed amount of money for meal (or grocery) purchases.

2. **Provide consistent shuttle service to local grocery stores.**
   Currently there are two grocery shuttle services. One shuttle runs to Trader Joe’s, the other to Shaw’s/Star Market. The committee recommends expanding this program to include more grocery stores.

3. **Explore the possibility of facilitating participation in Community-Supported Agriculture.**
   Some students participate in Community-Supported Agriculture programs (CSA’s), or farm shares. These programs deliver food products from local farms to campus or student residences in exchange for an up-front fee that supports the farm. Campus Dining has worked with Red Fire Farm (out of Granby, Massachusetts)\(^\text{47}\) to establish a regular CSA pick-up site at the Stata Center. Campus Dining should look for additional ways to educate students who cook about local CSA’s and facilitate their participation.

4. **Offer Cooking Classes.**
   Some students may come to MIT without cooking experience. To ensure that all students are equipped to cook nutritious meals, offer classes that teach cooking skills.

\(^{47}\) See [http://www.redfirefarm.com](http://www.redfirefarm.com)
**Recommendations Relating to Facilities**

1. **To prevent the perception of “barriers to accessing dining programs,” and to better secure residences that host dining programs, open external entrances to dining facilities.**

   Survey respondents reported that they were not comfortable visiting residences other than their own to eat in dining facilities. Further, the committee feels that no one should have access to a hall’s living space (separate from dining) except the residents of that hall and invited guests.

   The committee recommends that the Institute look to create entrances to existing dining halls that are separate from the main entrance of the residence hall. With a little modification, Baker, Simmons and possibly McCormick, could offer entrances to dining that do not compromise dorm security. In the long term, the Committee suggests that facilities are built with entrances and exits that are just for the dining room.

2. **Stagger hours of operation of residential dining halls.**

   Survey students to assess usage of residential dining halls and then stagger the opening and closing times of dining halls in order to increase total availability. This might allow more students to use the program without necessarily increasing staffing.

3. **Investigate the possibility of constructing a central dining facility.**

**Recommendations Related to Student Participation in the system**

The Committee saw a need to improve mechanisms for feedback and advises building a process that is dynamic and omni-directional. The Committee also recommends the creation of more opportunities for students to participate in the system.

1. **Offer opportunities for student employment in dining.**

   When consumers are part of something rather than solely the recipients of a product, it creates a more invested and involved consumer. The Committee feels that offering ways to be more involved in the system would make it more transparent, making customers more likely to understand and appreciate it. Employment opportunities for students within the system could include traditional positions in House Dining Rooms (like cashiers or line staff) or positions working for the Campus Dining office in Marketing or
other support functions. Student workers would be paid and could be compensated with free meals while working.

2. **Encourage existing student dining committees, especially those in communities with dining programs, to open seats for students who are outside of their community but have an interest in dining.**

All students are welcome to dine in all house dining rooms, but some report that they aren’t comfortable doing so because the program is in a residence hall that is not their own. Invite students from neighboring communities to participate in dining committees and make decisions about dining to help other communities feel more welcomed. For example, invite representatives from New House communities to participate in Next Dining Committees to help create a program that better meets the needs of both communities.

**Recommendations for Financial Sustainability**

Students who live in residences with a house dining room should continue to be required to pay into the system in order to support, but plans associated with the system should also be attractive enough to encourage high voluntary enrollment.

1. **Create an endowed fund.**

The Committee believes that reliance on customer funds to maintain the dining program promotes innovation and foster a competitive spirit, this ultimately drives vendors to make choices that attract and retain customers. Still, the committee acknowledges that there are some students who will not choose to support their dietary needs with appropriate spending no matter what the cost of the program if, in their eyes, money intended for food can be better spent on other things.

The Committee recommends that the Institute consider creating a ‘bucket’ within the *Campaign for Students* with the premise of creating a sustainable financial source to feed MIT students. ‘Food scholarships’ would certainly ensure that students would eat well during their time as undergraduates at the Institute.
Conclusion

The changes to the program suggested in this report, such as discontinuing the House Dining Membership discount program to introduce declining balance plans, are designed to facilitate a stronger dining program that invites higher participation. With more people using the system, other goals such as community interaction, nutritional support and financial stability can be achieved too. The Blue Ribbon Committee expects that the recommendations put forth in this report will help to create a system that better recognizes and meets the needs of all members of the MIT Community.
Appendix A: The Committee’s Charge

The existing dining program at MIT is complex: it provides a lot of options, serves a number of constituents, and seeks to meet a variety of needs. The Blue Ribbon Committee on dining has been convened to examine that structure and to determine what the dining structure at MIT should look like in the years to come. This is an advisory group, not a decision-making body. In the end, this committee will provide recommendations for dining options on campus.

The purpose of a dining program is about more than just providing food. There is a nutritional aspect that recognizes the relationship between sound nutrition and learning ability, an aspect that encourages social engagement over meals, and a community-building aspect that says meals should bring students as participant of a larger Institute family, not just residents of one house or region of campus. Meals should promote a broader sense of community and break down stereotypes. They should also offer students an opportunity to interact with faculty in an informal learning environment.

The charge to this committee is:

- To review/assess our current model, programs, locations, menus, etc. in order to fully understand what MIT currently has in place.
- To review/assess MIT’s current pricing model for appropriateness, perceived value, sustainability, etc.
- To gather data on how MIT students, graduate and undergraduate, spend money to food, looking at how they eat, when they eat, where they eat and what they eat.
- To assess the impact of the food trucks, Lobdell Food Court, MacGregor Convenience Store, Forbes Family Café, and other retail operations on residential dining.
- To explore other delivery and pricing models.

This committee’s work is much broader than simply looking at the residential dining programs as they exist and try to tweak them. If the committee starts and ends there it will have done a lot of work without accomplishing a lot. The group will need to look at many different variables and the overall system to make recommendations that will strengthen and improve the MIT Residential Dining system as a whole.
Appendix B: Committee Membership

Students, faculty, and staff on the committee represent a variety of perspectives. The work of the Committee spanned several semesters, some student members had to retire from the Committee and were replaced by other student members. Membership is shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (Alphabetical)</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kathryn Beaudry</td>
<td>Assistant Director of Finance, Division of Student Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Bennie**</td>
<td>Vice President, Undergraduate Association ’08-09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich Berlin</td>
<td>Director of Dining</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kate Delaney</td>
<td>Undergraduate Housemaster, East Campus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Donna Denoncourt</td>
<td>Associate Dean, Residential Life (Committee Chair)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leeland Ekstrom*</td>
<td>Graduate Student Council President ’07-08</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benjamin Epstein**</td>
<td>Special Dietary Concerns Representative, Class of ’10</td>
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<td>Suzanne Flynn</td>
<td>Undergraduate Housemaster, Ashdown</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nan Gu</td>
<td>Sidney/Pacific President, Graduate Student Representative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chris Hoffman</td>
<td>Undergraduate Association Dining Chair, Simmons Hall Chair, Class of ’08, Alumni Member Fall ’08 - Spring ’09</td>
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<td>Martin Holmes</td>
<td>Undergraduate Association President ’07-08, Class of ’09</td>
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<td>Sarah Hopp*</td>
<td>DormCon President ’07-08, Class of ’08</td>
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<tr>
<td>Noah Jessop**</td>
<td>Undergraduate Association President ’08-09, Class of ’09</td>
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<td>John McDonald</td>
<td>Director of Enterprise Services</td>
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<td>Colleen Mosley*</td>
<td>DormCon Vice President, Class of ’09</td>
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<td>Erin Munself**</td>
<td>Undergraduate Association Dining Chair ’08-09, Class of ’09</td>
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<td>Matt Putnam*</td>
<td>Baker House Representative, Class of ’09</td>
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<td>Preeya Phadnis**</td>
<td>Dorm Con Vice President, ’08-09</td>
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<td>Rebecca Rich*</td>
<td>McCormick Hall Representative, Class of ’10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peg Rodger</td>
<td>Consultant, Envision Strategies</td>
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<td>Derric Tay*</td>
<td>Next House Representative, Class of ’08</td>
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<td>James Torres</td>
<td>DormCon President ’08-09, Class of ’10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anne Wilson</td>
<td>Marketing Specialist, Campus Dining (recording)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ali Wyne*</td>
<td>Undergraduate Association, Vice President ’07-’08, Class of ’08</td>
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* Participated in committee meetings but retired from the committee before the process was completed.  
** Joined the committee in the second year
Appendix C: Zone Map

This map shows the MIT campus divided into “zones” to allow participants in the Market Research Study to respond to questions regarding locations. The BRC also makes reference to these zones in our report.
Appendix D: Statement Regarding Reports from Envision Strategies

As part of the Blue Ribbon Process, Envision Strategies preformed market research and completed a meal plan study on the Institute’s dining system. Consultants were called upon to provide recommendations for improvement based on their expertise. Although their findings were extremely valuable in informing the BRC’s process, the committee disagreed with some of the elements of their report. Input from Envision Strategies represents just one of many factors that influenced the Committee’s recommendations.

Envision reports represent the opinions of Envision Strategies, not the opinions of the Blue Ribbon Committee. The following list includes points from the Envision Strategies report that Committee supports and used in making recommendations. The Blue Ribbon Committee does not support points from the Envision Strategies report other than those listed below. The committee believes the many of the recommendations given by Envision Strategies were beneficial for debate and discussion, but not practical for implementation at MIT. The established culture, eating habits and dining facilities at MIT are not a good match for Envisions’ recommendations.

Points we support include:

- **Dining is an important part of the residential life experience.**
  This statement was supported by the dining survey data, the focus group reports and the students and faculty on the Committee.

- **Most students do not believe that they currently eat a balanced diet.**
  This statement is supported by the self-reported survey data.

- **AYCE dinners and breakfasts should be provided in at least one centrally located dining hall**
  The Envision Strategies report makes a short-term recommendation that MIT offer AYCE breakfasts and dinners in specific dining halls. The Committee can support the concept of offering AYCE meals, and endorses Baker as a possible location, but does not feel the selection of a dining hall(s) can be determined without the approval of house residents.

- **In the long-term, MIT should consider creating a central AYCE facility that is not part of a residence.**
  The BRC strongly agrees with this recommendation, and believes a centrally located
dining hall that is not located in a residence will foster many of the committee’s vision statements.

- **Meals are a good opportunity for faculty to interact with students, and programs should be developed to encourage this.**
  
  The BRC agrees with the statement as the survey indicates around one-third of faculty self-reported they would be interested in dining with students once a month. However, the current structure of the residential dining model does not meet their schedule or preferences.

- **Commitment to a meal plan should be required only of students who live in dorms with dining halls (as described in Envision Strategies’ meal plan “Scenario G”.)** Although the Committee agrees with the meal plan requirement, members do not agree with the specific dining halls mentioned in Scenario ‘G’.
1. **$600 Minimum Commitment to Individualized Eating Plan (See pages 30-34)**

   As noted on page 33 of this report, the Committee supported the idea of Individualized Eating Plans (IEPs) in principle, but did not support the $600 minimum buy-in level proposed.

   The amount was based on a minimum commitment of four All-You-Care-to-Eat (AYCE) dinners for 15 weeks per semester, at a cost of $10 per dinner. This would equate to $600 per semester for the minimum requirement meal plan. Those choosing commitments higher than $600 would get more value, as the cost-per-meal would be reduced with higher commitments. The Committee felt that the minimum amount had to be able to minimally sustain the program. It was intended to be the minimum amount that would support the residential dining halls, the dining program, and offer students flexibility in their dining habits.

   In voting, Committee members were asked to indicate whether they were “in favor” or “opposed” to the statement: “Based on estimated “costs of doing business,” the minimum commitment to an IEP should be $600 (not including the opt-out option).” Committee members were slightly more “in favor” than “opposed” with 60% supporting the statement, but the statement did not receive the requisite 75% support and is, therefore, not submitted as a final recommendation.

2. **Individualized Eating Plan, Opt-Out Option (See pages 30-34)**

   In draft reports, the committee proposed an “opt-out” option be included as an Individualized Eating Plan (IEP) to allow those who wanted to live in a Community with a Dining requirement to choose not to participate in their community’s program. The recommendation was written as follows:

   **IEP Opt-out Option**
   
   *The Committee recommends that students who live in a residence with a dining hall, but who do not wish to purchase a meal plan, may opt out of their community requirement for $500 per term. The amount of this fee is based on the fixed costs of providing a residential dining program.*
The $500 opt-out was established to recognize that some students wish to live in a residence with a House Dining operation for other reasons than participation in a dining operation, such students under the current program might pay the $300 fee and never use the House Dining program. These students are neither contributing to dining as part of the community experience nor are they contributing sufficient resources to support the operation.

The $500 fee does not correct issues relating to community dining participation but does cover the fixed costs of the dining operation. The fee, which is intentionally close to the minimum dining participation level of $600, may encourage all students in residences with House Dining to choose participate in dining as the community intends, but also does give those who wish to obtain meals elsewhere the option to do so.

The amount of the fee ($500) was derived by adding the projected labor cost and other fixed costs forecasted by the current House Dining contractor, Bon Appétit, for the implementation year (2010) and then dividing the total by the number of required participants from Baker House, Next House, Simmons Hall and McCormick Hall. This came to $514.38, and was rounded down to $500 because the variance represented less than 3% of total projected fixed expenses.

The cost of labor and other fixed expenses in running a Dining program is incurred by the contractor (and therefore MIT) regardless of a student's choice to attend dinner or not. Food and food costs are saved when a student chooses to eat elsewhere. Food, food costs and other variable expenses are presented on a perfect basis where no attendance equals no variable costs incurred.

Ultimately, the committee rejected both the concept and the $500 amount proposed as the fee. To the concept, Committee members were asked to vote on the statement: “Students who live in a residence with a dining hall, but who do not wish to purchase a meal plan, may opt out for a fee. This fee would help pay for the dining program as a community amenity but that student would have no commitment to dining in residence.” This statement received a vote of 73.3% “in favor,” 26.7% “opposed.”
To the amount, Committee members were asked to vote on the statement: “Based on fixed operational costs, the amount of the opt-out fee should be around $500.” This statement received a vote of 46.7% “in favor,” 53.3% “opposed.”

3. **Reformatting the service style at MacGregor Convenience**

The Committee did not support the recommendation that MacGregor Convenience be “upgraded” from a convenience store to an operation that offers hot food, late night and delivery services. With 66.7% “in favor” and 33.3% “opposed,” this recommendation did not receive enough support to propose.
Appendix F: Comments from Public Forums

Community Comments

This compendium contains all of the comments received by the Committee from the MIT Community in response to the publicized drafts of this report. A first draft was made public on April 27, 2009 and a second draft was made public on May 4; the comments in this Appendix were received between April 27 and May 11, 2009. This section includes e-mails and notes from community forums. Names and email address have been removed from correspondence because the Committee did not seek permission to attribute comments.

A special meeting was held with the Undergraduate Association Senate, but the approved minutes from that meeting were not available at the time this report was published. Minutes from UA Senate meetings are available online at: http://ua.mit.edu/senate/minutes

Received in response to the April 27, 2009 Draft:

From:  
Sent: Monday, April 27, 2009 7:56 PM  
To:  
Subject: Re: Blue Ribbon Committee report posted

Dear Blue Ribbon Committee,

As a resident of McCormick, I feel this proposed dining plan is unfair. McCormick has one or two kitchens per floor, depending on which tower you look at, and thus the residents should not be forced into a mandatory meal plan. The convenience of the kitchen makes it much more practical and cost effective to prepare one’s own meals. I frequently prepare a meal and while I wait for it to cook I work on a problem set or socialize with my friends. When I go to dining I have to wait, and it's very inconvenient to take my work with me, so I lose about half an hour of my day unnecessarily due to waiting in lines, or waiting for my food to cook. I did not want the dining hall when I chose to live in McCormick; I wanted the convenience, cleanliness, and most importantly the kitchen so that I could cook my own meals on my own schedule. Please
consider students like me who live in a dorm with a kitchen very close by who disliked that the
dorm also had a dining hall, and thus a mandatory meal plan. I lose $300/semester right now
on that dining plan that I use maybe once or twice a month, I really don't want to have to lose
$500 or more for nothing.
Thank you,

McCormick Resident

From:
Sent: Monday, April 27, 2009 8:14 PM
To: blue-ribbon@MIT.EDU
Subject: A suggestion for the Committee

Dear Sir or Madam,

I will not be able to attend your sessions so I am sending my recommendation through email.
Thank you for your consideration, this means a lot to the students.

I read your proposal thoroughly and I just have one recommendation. Instead of imposing a
$500 charge for those who choose to "opt-out" of the proposed dining program, perhaps the
blue ribbon committee can consider and discuss the option of "lumping" the dining membership
fee into the dorm living fee. Currently residents of the dorms with dining halls are charged a
dorm living fee + a dining membership fee. My recommendation is that instead of having the two
separate fees, charge students one big fee on their bill. So, living at Next House, Baker,
Simmons, and McCormick [sic] will be more expensive. But the "perk" is that students at these
dorms have a dining hall at their convenience. If students feel that the living fee at these
dorms is too expensive, then they can certainly choose to live in other dorms that do not have a dining
hall and they can cook for themselves.

Psychologically, this method makes students think they are getting a good deal because their
living expenses includes a dining hall. Students would not be able to opt-out of dining, but they
would also not be charged a huge fee for not choosing to live in the dorm. Of course, other
students from other dorms may join the dining program, but they would have to pay the
dining membership fee.

What I have recommended is almost the same as the current situation. The only difference is the way students and parents will view the dining program. It will no longer be a separate entity from the living cost.

Furthermore, it doesn't look like the quality of the food at the dining halls will improve drastically if Au Bon Pain [sic] remains the provider. So, paying more for the same food we are getting now does not seem to make sense.

The student food scholarship might have some complications too. Does everyone receive this scholarship? How will you choose who gets one and who doesn't? Everyone is suffering...in one way or another... How much will the scholarship be worth? $600? $500?

As MIT students, we are used to having many choices. However, being charged a fee for choosing NOT to join something does NOT make sense to ANYONE on this campus. I hope you consider my recommendation and please contact me if any clarification is needed.

Thank you,

Next House Resident

From:
Sent: Monday, April 27, 2009 9:21 PM
To: blue-ribbon@MIT.EDU
Subject: Support for the proposal

Dear Blue Ribbon Dining Committee,

I offer my strong support for the recommendations you propose, and I especially like the idea of offering AYCE Breakfast and Dinner in at least one dining hall. We should continue to keep improving the quality of food served in our dining halls and build a stronger community by
encouraging students to participate in house dining. The flexibility of the IEP options would allow students to choose the plan that suits their dietary needs.

I hope that these recommendations are implemented in the near future!

Class of 2011

From: 
Sent: Monday, April 27, 2009 9:44 PM 
To: donnamd@MIT.EDU 
Subject: Re: Blue Ribbon Committee report posted

Hi Donna,

I just finished doing a first pass over the report, and I must say that it looks quite good, and very comprehensive. I like the fact that the BRC is trying to provide as many options as possible. Of course I need to give it some further thought, but that's my first impression.

You've obviously put in a lot of effort into this, congratulations on getting through all of the riots and leaks and rumors; producing what looks like a promising report :)

From: Kate Delaney [mailto:kdelaney@MIT.EDU] Committee Member
Sent: Thursday, April 30, 2009 9:38 AM
To: blue-ribbon@MIT.EDU
Subject: feedback from forum at EC

Attached you'll find the notes from the EC forum. We had 35 students. The strongest feelings were on the issues of too little time for feedback and the cost of opting out.

Mike and Kate
Mike Bennie and Kate Delaney met with 35 EC students in Talbot Lounge. Many students had not yet had time to read the report. Students felt that there should have been more time between posting the draft report and asking for feedback. Also more time between posting the report and voting on it. It was mentioned that Donna Denoncourt had pledged during a UA meeting that there would be a two-week period for student feedback between the time the draft was posted and the time the report was voted on and adopted. The May 8 deadline does not allow the time promised. Also students asked for a second round of feedback/comments on the new version of the report—one incorporating the changes arising from this feedback round and having been approved by the BRC.

There was much discussion of the opt-out fee. $500 was termed a “ridiculous” amount. Half that amount was termed “reasonable” for an opt-out fee.

People questioned the cost of plans (too high) and the timing for committing to a plan. It was suggested that students try out dining on a cash basis for a month and decide on Sept 30 whether to buy a plan or opt out. Other suggestions were for plans with smaller increments or done on a weekly or monthly basis.

There was concern expressed about creating a financial divide between dining hall and non-dining hall dorms which could adversely affect EC if students chose EC for economic reasons rather than for reasons of cultural compatibility. Adding mandatory meal plans (or opt-out fees) to the costs of dining hall dorms will mean that price differences between dorms could be as much as $1000 per semester.

There was strong agreement that the recommendations should explicitly state that kitchens create and sustain community. There was a feeling that kitchens and non-dining hall dorms were being short-changed in the recommendations. There should be an explicit commitment to renovate kitchens (with student input).

There was a request for a late night option closer to the east side.

Students supported student-run dining operations for late night and also to reduce costs.
Students wanted to see more teeth put into contracts with third party vendors to ensure quality. There should be built-in mechanisms to review contracts and cancel those with vendors who do not provide quality service.

The report was praised for its analysis but questions were raised about what improvements were being offered. What benefits does the plan bring? “Proposal doesn’t fix what is wrong.”

From: Anne Wilson [mailto:awwilson@MIT.EDU] Committee Member
Sent: Thursday, April 30, 2009 10:11 AM
To: blue-ribbon@mit.edu
Subject: Simmons Forum

Good Morning BRC,

We had no participants for the Simmons forum last night, but Ellen Essigman did come and shared support for the IEP concept. She thought that it would be something that could help freshmen to think a little more about what, where and how they're going to eat while on campus, and to have discussions with their parents about it prior to coming to MIT.

Best,
Anne

Received in response to the May 4, 2009 draft:

From:
Sent: Tuesday, May 05, 2009 2:03 PM
To: donnamd@mit.edu
Cc:
Subject: Re: Second draft of Blue Ribbon Dining report
Hi Donna,

Overall, I think that this is a very good report. I have a few comments/questions that I didn't have time to make with the first draft…

*Current House Dining Plan* -
This plan was developed as a new dining plan model by Simmons residents, prior the building opening in August 2002. Although not perfect, the Simmons dining model re-energized house dining at MIT:

In recognition of the success of the new Simmons dining plan, similar programs were voted into place in 2003 by the student governments of Baker and Next. At Next House, the Simmons dining plan (along with an amazing dining hall renovation) helped to rescue a moribund program that was on the verge of collapse. The success of the new dining model at Simmons, Baker and Next encouraged McCormick to re-open its dining hall, closed many years earlier, using the Simmons dining model. The use of the Simmons dining model has resulted in a marked decrease in the dining deficit that MIT is saddled with each year. Most members of the houses using the Simmons model really like it - the food, the service, the community dining opportunity. Those who oppose the existing model tend to be either very busy upperclassmen and those with very specific dietary needs that are difficult to meet in a house dining program. Those who oppose the program tend to be very vocal about it, even though they chose to live in a dorm with the program already in place. I think it appropriate to include some of the positive aspects of the Simmons model in your report - in addition to pointing out its limitations.

*Night Cafe* -
I noticed the optional night cafe plan. Does this mean that the basic plan for Simmons residents would not provide a discount at the Night Cafe? I am concerned that this will kill our night cafe - which is an important part of Simmons night life and culture.

*REX Dining* -
Several years ago, when I was one of the housemaster members of SLOPE, I argued in favor of spotlighting house dining culture during REX. The plan was to have dining open in dorms with dining halls. It also encouraged dorms without dining halls to model the ways that existing
residents dined - taking freshmen to other dorms to eat, taking them to shop for food and cook in the dorm kitchens, eating elsewhere at MIT or Cambridge, etc., etc.

Many were in favor of this, including Campus Dining. SLOPE representatives from halls without dining, were worried that this would place them at a disadvantage and also argued that there was so much free food during REX that no one would want to do this.

End result - a catered dinner served buffet style at every single dorm (including non-dining hall dorms) on the first Sunday night of orientation week. Everyone arrived all at once - making the buffet lines so long that guests had little time to socialize over their meals. Parents were also invited, a decision that had an impact on the atmosphere and on upperclassmen's ability to really interact with the freshmen. Finally, the choices were very limited (pasta with meat or pasta without) and bore no resemblance to what would normally be offered and what the cost would be.

Then, later in the week, there was another dining-related event, this time only at dorms with dining halls. It featured different foods at each dorm (deserts at one, entrees at another, etc.) which were served buffet style (not cafeteria style) with a stretch hummer limo to shuttle students from house to house. Again, this was not a real life dining experiences (limited selection, buffet service rather than cafeteria service, and freshmen being dumped into the dining hall). Although freshmen got to travel and eat with each other, it wasn't a leisurely dining experience shared with upperclassmen. Finally, this was scheduled too late to have any impact on student decisions on where they wanted to live and there were other competing events taking place at other dorms.

Incoming Freshman have, at best, only a fuzzy idea of what dining is really going to be like at the dorm of their choice - what they see during REX is a lot of free food that magically appears out of no where. I think that there has to be more of a "reality dining" experience to take place early in REX - even if it is on just one night. To be successful, It should involve a critical mass of the upperclassmen who are early returns. This means that there needs to be nothing else competing with it - anywhere on campus or at Greek houses. It also needs to be subsidized by MIT - at minimum, with discount dining and discount food shopping for participating freshmen and upperclassmen. MIT should also arrange to run the shuttle to local stores and the EC produce stand for that day.
Blue Ribbon Dining Proposed Plan -
This sounds a lot like the old style of MIT dining plan, which was a miserable failure. So, I am worried.

Why not just tinker with the Simmons model to decrease the deficit and add flexibility to the program? You could raise the "opt out" fee and also raise the dining pre-payment fee for all freshmen (parents don't mind this at all, they really like it and they are paying the bill). Then, a lower pre-paid fee option could then be made available to upperclassmen (one that declines with each year at the dorm). I think that an increased pre-payment for freshmen, should also cover a discount at the night cafe. The night cafe plan could be offered, for a fee, to interested upperclassmen who have either opted out or who have chosen a reduced dining plan.

Adding mandatory dining, at least a minimum version, for all freshmen would also help to reduce the deficit. The fee could be set lower for frosh at dorms without dining halls. It should be large enough to encourage frosh, who would otherwise survive on pizza alone, to eat at least a few good meals in a dining hall. This addition to the existing plan shouldn't interfere with the cooking cultures of these dorms, because most freshmen do not want to cook every night. Freshmen who are part of a theme house dining program (like Spanish House) should be exempted, of course.

AYCTE -
I think that opening AYCTE at the new W1 is the way to go. Instituting a new plan in an existing dorm is very difficult. Even Next and Baker only voted for it to be mandatory for incoming freshmen and not existing residents.

Once students get more experience with AYCTE at W1, there may be enough interest to make it happen at other dorms.

That's all for now!
best,
Housemaster

From:
Hello Donna,

I just looked at the final report. I actually liked the draft report (attached) more than the final report. I think you folks bent over too much to accommodate the loud voices of the angry mob. I still like the idea of an IEP, which is much needed and very .... personal. The problem I have with the bottom line recommendations to centralize dining is that we have been there and done that -- and it was a social and financial failure. The Lobdell option, with "mall like" feeding reinforces the clique eating mode that they carry with them from their mall based childhoods. It does not build communities the way community dining does in the dorms and FSILGs.

My other problem with the report is the lack of numbers. Someone knows exactly how much money we lost 10 years ago, when we had a model that emphasized central dining and only two dining halls open. It sounds to me as if the report is pushing us back into an era that was not financially tenable. Moreover the parents at the time were haranguing the administration to do something better for their children's dining options. This report will confuse them.

I am sorry to kick off your weekend with a depressing message, but this plan just does not seem to me to have legs.

Best,

Housemaster