

A Resolution to Revise Dining Options and Plans at OSU

Christopher Cade (for himself, Kris Hansen, Ezra Liu) on behalf of Mykenna Roy introduced the following resolution to the Student Affairs Committee where it passed/failed. Then, to the Steering Committee where it passed/failed, and to the floor where it passed/failed.

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Whereas the Undergraduate Student Government represents all undergraduate students at The Ohio State University; and

Whereas meal plan prices at The Ohio State University have increased significantly in recent years, while students report a reduction in portion sizes and meal quality, thus diminishing the overall value of meal swipes; and

Whereas students have expressed concerns about overcrowded dining facilities, such as Traditions at Scott, which make it difficult to access meals during peak hours, leading to long wait times and limited seating availability; and

Whereas access to nutritious, balanced meals is a critical factor for student well-being, academic performance, and mental health, as emphasized by Dr. Ryan S. Patel, OSU psychiatrist, who has researched that proper nutrition plays a significant role in cognitive function, emotional regulation, and overall mental health¹; and

Whereas the current meal plans offered by Ohio State University, particularly the Visit Exchange Program, fail to consistently provide students with the necessary nutritional variety and balance needed to support their mental and physical health; and

Whereas a longtime administrator with OSU Dining Services, shared that dining faces financial challenges, as only around 60% of students pay meal plan increases due to the tuition guarantee, while unionized and non-unionized staff wage increases have further impacted Dining's operational budget; and

Whereas the high operational costs associated with maintaining retail dining locations, which require specialized equipment, increased staff, and unique training, have led to deficits, and student meal swipes at these locations are valued at \$8 because they are not meant to cover full, balanced meals; and

¹ <https://u.osu.edu/emotionalfitness/category/nutrition-mental-health/>

Whereas other Big Ten universities, such as University of Michigan and University of Illinois, provide meal plans with more nutritionally complete options, culturally diverse meals, and competitive cost-per-meal rates, offering more value and dietary balance compared to Ohio State’s dining plan structure²; and

Whereas Dining Services at OSU faces further financial constraints due to COVID-19, which depleted cash reserves, and has been forced to reduce operational costs by switching to non-local suppliers and considering the removal of low-use facilities such as C-Stores, which incur high expenses without sufficient usage; and

Whereas theft, waste, and high turnover due to low wages contribute to OSU Dining’s financial strain, and Dining Services is currently exploring cost-saving measures like food lockers and adjusting hours for underused locations to reduce operational losses³; and

Whereas universities like the University of Wisconsin and University of Nebraska have incorporated sustainable and locally sourced food initiative to enhance meal quality and align with national trends toward sustainability, offering a potential model for OSU to explore in future planning; and

Whereas the Visit Exchange Program, which allows students to trade meal swipes for retail dining options, does not consistently offer nutritionally balanced meals and often forces students to choose between convenience and nutrition; and

Whereas research in the field of nutritional psychiatry, as discussed by Dr. Eva Selhub from Harvard Medical School, demonstrates that diets rich in whole foods, fruits, vegetables, and lean proteins improve mood and brain function, while diets high in processed foods, sugars, and unhealthy fats contribute to depression, anxiety, and poor academic performance⁵; and

Whereas other Big Ten universities, such as University of Michigan and University of Illinois, provide meal plans that emphasize nutritious, culturally diverse meals that meet students' dietary needs, allowing for more balanced and consistent access to healthy foods; and

Whereas the University of Michigan boasts that they have “the best collegiate dining in the nation,” and that they “provide nutritious and culturally diverse meals that support physical and mental wellness,”; and

² [Appendix 2 - Cost Breakdown](#)

³ [Appendix 3 – Conversation with Dining Services](#)

Whereas universities like University of Iowa and Indiana University offer more competitive meal plans that combine affordability and nutritional value, with plans that allow students access to nutritious, all-you-care-to-eat meals at a cost per meal significantly lower² than Ohio State University; and

Whereas a cost comparison shows that Ohio State's 10-meals-per-week plan costs students \$14.29 per meal, while Indiana University offers a more affordable option at \$9.91 per meal, giving students more value for better access to nutritionally complete meals; and

Whereas the University of Wisconsin and University of Nebraska have adopted sustainable and locally sourced food initiatives⁴ to ensure higher-quality meals for students, a strategy that OSU could emulate to improve meal offerings and align with national trends toward sustainability and healthier eating habits; and

Whereas the current structure of OSU's meal plans does not sufficiently address the nutritional needs of students, as access to fresh, wholesome meals is limited in both variety and availability, especially at retail locations participating in the Visit Exchange Program.

Therefore, Let it Be Resolved that the Undergraduate Student Government supports a comprehensive review and revision of OSU's meal plan offerings, with a specific focus on improving the nutritional value and affordability of meals provided through the Visit Exchange Program while recognizing both the current financial constraints of Dining Services and Dining Services' crucial role as a student employer; and

Let it Further Be Resolved that the Undergraduate Student Government encourages The Ohio State University to financially support OSU Dining Services to pilot low-cost, high-nutrition menu items at retail locations and explore alternative meal options that can meet dietary needs without further increasing operational costs; and

Let it Further Be Resolved that USG supports initiatives aimed at improving staff wages and retention, recognizing that stability within Dining Services will contribute to an enhanced dining experience for students and reduce losses associated with training turnover; and

Let it Further Be Resolved that OSU should prioritize, as finances allow, a return to local and sustainable sourcing practices, including small business procurement, as demonstrated by the University of Wisconsin and University of Illinois, to improve meal quality, align with sustainability goals, and reduce waste; and

⁴ [Appendix 1 - Dining Cost Comparisons of Big 10 Schools in the Midwest](#)

Let it Finally Be Resolved that OSU should consider gradually revising its pricing structure to offer competitive meal plans more aligned with other Big Ten universities, ensuring that students receive nutritionally complete meals without overpaying for suboptimal options through the current meal plan system.

Floor Vote: Aye: 27 Nay: 0 Abstain: 0 Present: 27

Bobby McAlpine
President

George Bernard
Speaker of the 57th General Assembly

Date Adopted: 11/20/2024