Dining Services
Posted October 5, 2016
Last updated January 20, 2017

FAQs - Meal Plan Consultation
Response to Student Feedback

*This FAQ document will be updated weekly to address new feedback as it is received.*

**General/Background**
1. Why is the meal plan mandatory at Lister?
2. Will there be an option to opt out of the meal plan?
3. Why is it necessary to change? Why can’t we keep the current plan?
4. Why was this plan not implemented last fall?
5. How is this plan different from the one that was proposed last fall?
6. Were students consulted regarding this program change?

**Flex Dollars**
7. Will a Flex Dollar minimum be mandatory?
8. Will The Marina still accept my meal plan?

**Quality**
9. Why can’t the current plan have better quality or more variety?

**Value/Price**
10. What about students that build community by grocery shopping and cooking together?
11. The proposed Anytime Dining price is too high. How does it compare to another year of the Declining Balance program?
12. What about the students who cannot afford to live in residence and use the proposed meal plan?
13. Will this meal plan create a barrier to some students who want to live in Lister?
14. Where is the value for light eaters and/or students who travel home on weekends?
15. As an upper-year student why do I need a mandatory meal plan?

**Convenience**
16. How is it more convenient, if I have to travel back to Lister or Peter Lougheed Hall for my meals?
17. Why doesn’t the plan allow me to use meal plan dollars at other campus locations?
18. How will the boxed meals work? Can I have them very early if I need to get to my practicum, lab, etc?
19. Is there any room for the hours to open earlier than 7:30am?
20. Can we take meals back to our rooms?
21. Why can’t I take meals back to my room?
22. Can non-Lister residents participate in this plan? What if we want our friends/family to join us for dinner? What about staff or commuter students who want to be part of the community?

**Operations**
23. Is money only deducted when you go for food or is it deducted everyday regardless?
24. How will the leftover money be refunded?
25. Will there be a shortage of seats if everyone has to sit in the Dining Hall for every meal?
26. Can you add a second, lower-level plan to give students choice and to accommodate light eaters/commuters/students who want to cook their own meals?

**Current Residents**
27. If I don’t spend all my current meal plan money by the end of my residence contract, where will I be able to spend it next year?

**Communication**
28. How can we provide feedback to Dining Services going forward on how we feel about the meal plan?
General/Background

1. Why is the meal plan mandatory at Lister? *(Updated October 26)*
   Lister Residence has always included a mandatory meal plan because it is a crucial part of ensuring that students (primarily first-years) receive well-rounded nutritious meals. The program facilitates community building and engagement opportunities and allows students to take a break from their studies and connect with their peers.

2. Will there be an option to opt out of the meal plan? *(Updated Oct. 26)*
   No (see question 1).

3. Why is it necessary to change? Why can’t we keep the current plan? *(Updated Oct. 31)*
   Consistent with the goals included in the University's overarching strategic plans *(For the Public Good and Residence Strategic Plan)*, the University has launched major expansion/redevelopment/renovation projects in Lister Centre.
   - In response to low student “dining satisfaction” scores, $2.8 million has been invested in renovations to the kitchen, servery area, and seating/relaxation/study space in Lister Centre.
   - A new $40 million residence building is under construction, increasing the population of early-year undergraduate students in Lister Centre to over 2,200 in 2018.
   - Early planning and consultation with students has started on the design of a state-of-the-art “community centre” in Lister Centre that will facilitate a wide-range of services and functional spaces that support growth, community, and achievement.
   - For many years, the University has been administering an annual comprehensive, longitudinal survey (Skyfactor Mapworks). The survey collects data on student satisfaction during their time in residence—including “Overall Satisfaction with Dining Services” (quality, hours of operation, service, value, variety, environment, cleanliness). This survey is administered by 295 universities across Canada and the USA.
   - As tested over time and compared to other schools, “Overall Satisfaction with Dining Services” scores are low with respect to the University’s food program in Lister Residence, and low compared to other attributes of student life.
   - Students at Canadian universities that engage the same food services provider report significantly higher overall satisfaction through an Anytime Dining model.
   - The above noted phenomenon is attributed to student preference for the Anytime Dining program at other schools. The 25+ year old Declining Balance program in Lister Residence can no longer be adapted to meet students’ requirements.
In order to fulfil its mandate and its commitment to students, the University of Alberta MUST focus on improving student satisfaction in ALL areas.

4. Why was this plan not implemented last fall? (Updated Oct. 26)
   The University determined that more consultation and information gathering was required.

5. How is this plan different from the one that was proposed last fall? (Updated Jan. 20)
   - A second lower level plan has been added to give students choice and to accommodate light eaters, students who cook or travel home on weekends, etc.
   - The proposed plan for 2017 has more built-in flexibility (Peter Lougheed Hall cafeteria and CAB will be additional dining locations) than the plan proposed last year.
   - The proposed plan (Fall 2017) is less expensive ($4,650 for Level 1) than the proposal for Fall 2016 ($4,900).
   - The amount of Flex Dollars on the Level 1 plan has been increased to $400.
   - The proposed dining hours at Lister would be extended to begin at 7:00am instead of 7:30am on weekdays and hours would be extended during exams.
   - The University acknowledges that some additional planning by some students may be required.

6. Were students consulted regarding this program change? (Updated Nov. 8)
   Implemented at several Canadian Universities, the Anytime Dining model is the current trend in post-secondary residences. To determine if this plan was appropriate for Lister Residence, the University of Alberta:
   - Compared programs at several peer institutions.
   - Sent Lister Hall Students Association executives to visit Carleton University and review the program (2009).
   - Sent student representatives from Lister Residence and Dining Services staff to visit Carleton University (2015).
   - Dining Services Staff also visited St. Mary’s University, Wilfrid Laurier University the University of Toronto (2015), and Arizona State University to review their programs (2016).
   - The results of these peer-visits have been and continue to be discussed with student leaders and the Food Committee in Lister Residence (2015-2016).

   See question 3 about low student satisfaction with current Declining Balance plan and the website for the benefits of the Anytime Dining program.

Flex Dollars (Updated Nov. 18)

7. Will a Flex Dollar minimum be mandatory? (Updated Jan. 20)
   Yes, the current plan calls for $400 mandatory Flex Dollars for Level 1 and $300 for Level 2.
8. Will The Marina still accept my meal plan? *(Updated Jan. 20)*
   The Marina will accept Flex Dollars, debit, credit, or cash.

**Quality**

9. Why can’t the current plan have better quality or more variety? *(Updated Oct. 31)*
   
   Anytime Dining programs, now popular across North America, deliver on improvements to quality, quantity, variety and access (hours of operation) because they are more efficient than the Declining Balance (current) program, and those efficiencies are reinvested in improved quality.

**Value/Price** *(Updated Nov. 15)*

10. What about students that build community by grocery shopping and cooking together? *(Updated Oct. 26)*
    
    The goal of the Anytime Dining model is to promote community-building activities (cooking demonstrations and classes) in the Dining Hall. The option to grocery shop and cook with friends will still exist.

11. The proposed Anytime Dining price is too high. How does it compare to another year of the Declining Balance program? *(Updated Jan. 20)*
    
    The following table outlines the current Declining Balance price (2016-2017), the proposed Anytime Dining price (2017-2018), and the projected Declining Balance price for 2017-2018. The price increase for any dining program is subject to inflation year over year (CPI).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 – Meal Plan Options Comparisons – 2016 to 2017</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lister Residence Meal Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Declining Balance 2016 academic year (current)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anytime Dining Proposed 2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Declining Balance Alternative 2017</td>
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**Note(s):**
1. In 2015/2016 academic year, students added a total of $117,000 (an average of $448 per student), to these levels
2. Lower than CPI
3. Higher than proposed meal plan without money added per Note 1 (above)
4. Change in CPI August 2015 - 2016. Note these prices TBD and could be higher based on current CPI, carbon levy, minimum wage increases.
12. What about the students who cannot afford to live in residence and use the proposed meal plan?

We understand that the meal plan is one part of the cost for a student attending the University of Alberta and living in residence. The cost proposed for the Anytime Dining Meal Plan is still below the cost at other comparable institutions, and we continue to strive to demonstrate the value of the plan. For additional information for financial support beyond student loans, please refer to the Office of the Registrar.

13. Will this meal plan create a barrier to some students who want to live in Lister? (Updated Jan. 20)

Compared to peer institutions, Lister Residence ranks among the lowest for room and board prices across Canada. The University of Alberta has a responsibility to measure the effectiveness of the program on an ongoing basis.

Table 2 – Price Comparison of Proposed Plan (Level 1) to Current Plans in Canada

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution Name</th>
<th>Base (without Flex)</th>
<th>Flex</th>
<th>With Flex Dollars</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Alberta (proposed 2017-2018)</td>
<td>$4,250.00</td>
<td>$400.00</td>
<td>$4,650.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Unlimited access, unlimited food</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wilfrid Laurier University (2016-2017)³</td>
<td>$4,750.00</td>
<td>$500.00</td>
<td>$5,250.00²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memorial University of Newfoundland (2016-2017)³</td>
<td>$4,905.00</td>
<td>$125.00</td>
<td>$5,030.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carleton University (2016-2017)³</td>
<td>$4,700.00</td>
<td>$200.00</td>
<td>$4,900.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Manitoba (2016-2017)³</td>
<td>$5,268.00</td>
<td>$125.00</td>
<td>$5,393.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
1. Some institutions on this table, including the University of Alberta, offer multiple levels with varying degrees of access, ONLY the “unlimited” are listed for comparison.
2. Includes $50.00 capital improvement levy.
3. Note that prices at comparable institutions reflect current rates, and will likely increase for 2017-2018

14. Where is the value for light eaters and/or students who travel home on weekends? (Updated Jan. 20)

In order to address the concerns of these students, the latest proposal now includes a second, lower-level plan (see question 26).
15. As an upper-year student why do I need a mandatory meal plan? *(Updated Nov. 15)*

The mandatory meal plan supports the first year experience in Lister Residence. As an upper year student, there are a variety of housing options available to you that do not require a meal plan.

**Convenience**

16. How is it more convenient, if I have to travel back to Lister or Peter Lougheed Hall for my meals? *(Updated Jan. 20)*

The University acknowledges that the Anytime Dining program base-funding will not be available to spend at all of the outlets where the current plan is accepted and, as such, may not meet the needs of some students. However, Lister residents currently spend 75% of their meal plan money in Lister Centre (Source: ONEcard).

Responding to the needs of students who may not be able to make it back to Lister for all meals:

- extended hours (proposed: weekdays 7:00am-10:00pm; weekends 9:00am-10:00pm; extended during exams) will be implemented to accommodate varied schedules
- a “boxed” meal program will be offered and easily accessed
- Peter Lougheed Hall’s beautiful new cafeteria will be available for Lister residents. Peter Lougheed Hall is on the opposite end of campus from Lister Residence, so many classes will be near this location (Humanities Centre, Business, Tory, Arts buildings).
- a third dining location will be added to CAB for lunch and dinner. Multiple options will be available: Soup, Entrée, Salad Bar, Beverage, Fresh Fruit/Dessert. Students will not need to order ahead.
  - Hours of Operation (Monday-Friday): Lunch 11:30am-1:30pm, Dinner 4:30pm-7:30pm

17. Why doesn’t the plan allow me to use meal plan dollars at other campus locations? *(Updated Jan. 20)*

There is growing concern that under the current Declining Balance (debit-card style) meal plan, students run out of money before the end of the term and are resorting to eating low-cost, empty calorie (fast food) meals to make ends meet. The Anytime Dining model encourages students to eat well-rounded, nutritious meals.

Students can select smaller portions, from an increased number and variety of rotating stations, as many times as they like, all for one price paid at the beginning of term. In order to deliver the unlimited Anytime Dining program in Lister Dining Hall, CAB and Peter Lougheed Hall, a base meal plan fee of $4,250 is required.
18. How will the boxed meals work? Can I have them very early if I need to get to my practicum, lab, etc? *(Updated Oct. 28)*

There will be a process in place to order boxed meals for pick up before going to class to accommodate varying student schedules.

19. Is there any room for the hours to open earlier than 7:30am? *(Updated Nov. 15)*

Based on student feedback, the hours of operation will begin at 7:00 a.m. on weekdays.

20. Can we take meals back to our rooms?

No, meals cannot be taken out of the dining hall outside of boxed meals. Some items, such as fresh fruit and snacks will be allowed out of the Dining Hall.

21. Why can’t I take meals back to my room? *(Updated Oct. 26)*

The Anytime Dining program supports the University’s proposed Healthy University Strategic Plan by helping students reduce stress, which lends itself to increased nutritional and mental health. One of the primary focuses of the program is to promote and foster a community-based dining experience in the Dining Hall and to thereby reduce isolation in dorm rooms.

The Anytime Dining plan is also in keeping with the University of Alberta’s 2016-2020 Sustainability Plan because it reduces packaging and food waste by eliminating the need for trays and to-go containers (except for boxed meals).

22. Can non-Lister residents participate in this plan? What if we want our friends/family to join us for dinner? What about staff or commuter students who want to be part of the community? *(Updated Oct. 26)*

Yes. The University of Alberta will explore this feature of the program going forward.

**Operations** *(Updated Oct. 26)*

23. Is money only deducted when you go for food or is it deducted everyday regardless? *(Updated Nov. 15)*

The Anytime Dining program offers a single price, paid once at the beginning of the academic term. With this model there are no deductions per transaction.

24. How will the leftover money be refunded? *(Updated Nov. 18)*

The proposed meal plan will not have left over money like the Declining Balance program, so only Flex Dollars will be refundable (For more information see the [ONEcard Cardholder Agreement](#)).

25. Will there be a shortage of seats if everyone has to sit in the Dining Hall for every meal? *(Updated Oct. 26)*

No, the University has a contingency plan in the event that capacity becomes an issue.
26. Can you add a second, lower-level plan to give students choice and to accommodate light eaters/commuters/students who want to cook their own meals? (Updated Jan. 20)

Yes, based on student feedback we have proposed adding a second, lower-level plan:

- Level 2 - $4,285
- includes $300 Flex Dollars
- 5 day unlimited access

Current Residents

27. If I don't spend all my current meal plan money by the end of my residence contract, where will I be able to spend it next year? (Updated Nov. 23)

Regardless of changes to the meal plan for next year, unspent meal plan funds from the current year will carry over as stated in the FAQ section on the Residence Services site:

The full amount of your meal plan will remain on your ONEcard until used. At the end of your residence contract, any remaining funds will be transferred from your meal plan account to a "taxable meal plan" balance on your ONEcard. These funds may then be spent at the same locations your Meal Plan is currently accepted. Please note that GST will be applied to purchases from this account balance as those funds will no longer be exempt, and that unspent balances cannot be transferred to ONEcard Cash.

Any changes to the program will be communicated to current residents prior to the end of the Winter 2017 term.

Communication

28. How can we provide feedback to Dining Services going forward on how we feel about the meal plan? (Updated Nov. 15)

Every resident will have an opportunity to provide detailed feedback on their overall satisfaction through existing annual (Winter Term) survey tools (Skyfactor Student Satisfaction Survey).

The Food Committee meets monthly and is open to all Lister residents to evaluate and review Dining Services operations. Students can also reach out to their Food Ambassadors with any questions or concerns (food.ambassador@ualberta.ca).

Dining Services has a commitment to developing real-time feedback mechanisms in the Lister Dining Hall through a variety of social media platforms, and we remain open to suggestions on how to improve communications. Please email us at dining@ualberta.ca with any questions or concerns about the meal plan.