

Radical policy change

What your food money buys at York...

By WARREN CLEMENTS

The mechanics of this year's version of the residence meal plan read like a Bob Newhart skit.

"Look, you give me \$420, and I'll give you \$420 worth of paper scrip which is worthless after April 30, can only be used on campus, and involves the same danger of theft or loss as cash."

"Right. And then what?"

"Nothing. That's it. (Long pause.)"

"Wait a minute..."

The new meal voucher plan is a radical change from last year's meal card. The card, a personalized plastic pass which allowed a resident to take one main course and limitless desserts and salads, has been discontinued because it was costing the university too much.

The benefit of the new plan, from the administrators' point of view, is that they receive cash in exchange for meal vouchers. There are four plans, with incentives attached to the more expensive versions.

For \$420, roughly \$1.35 a meal for 10 meals a week over 31 weeks, a student receives no incentive. For \$650, \$1.30 a meal for 19 meals a week, he receives a discount of \$40; in other words, he pays \$610.

The equivalent prices for the same meals last year were \$375 and \$495 respectively. The difference was that last year's student could eat as much as he liked. For \$1.35 this year, a student is fortunate to arouse his digestive acids.

A visit this week to the Central Square cafeteria, for instance, showed that \$1.35 will buy a serving of meat and potato, one vegetable, a small drink and a piece of pie.

Hard-sell campaign

No student may enter residence without agreeing to join one of the four plans. And to soften any hard feelings, ancillary services, the university department which oversees contractor Versafood, has launched a hard-sell advertising campaign calling the cash-scrip exchange a "personal dining plan."

"Introducing an exciting and unique food service programme for resident students," says one folder, "designed for every life style, every personal budget."

The folder tells the student that he may withdraw scrip only at room 37.

Temporary Office Building, between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. on weekdays.

Lyn Brooks, director of VS services (Versa), agrees that residence students opting for the less expensive plan are suffering under the voucher system.

"That's one of the most serious things against this type of system," he said in an interview "Those students receive no benefit for being in residence. We had to sacrifice this for flexibility."

Not surprisingly, the problems with last year's plan were financial, stemming from last fall's failure to meet enrollment projections.

"The university lost hundreds of thousands of dollars on residences and food," said Brooks. "We were faced with having to increase our prices 20 to 30 per cent to offset the deficit."

Last year's meal plan was based on a bell-curved system, with large numbers of people eating the same thing as inexpensively as possible. When students began to grumble, Versa began to allow seconds.

"We were trying to stretch the concept to remain financially viable while satisfying the customers," Brooks said.

After last fall's budget "crisis", the word came down from the university that there was to be no deficit budgeting, an order which created havoc in ancillary services.

Brooks advised closing two college serveries, which would have meant relocating 15 workers and cutting overhead.

Colleges are over-equipped

"The colleges are over-equipped, with double serveries and double dining halls. Why build a restaurant with 300 seats when only 100 use it?"

"But the colleges rejected our suggestion. I guess they reasoned that if they lost that part, maybe the rest of the college system would go too. It's better than being a computer number. What's a \$75,000 deficit compared to that?"

To find a cheaper meal plan the caterer searched North America; and the effort paid off.

The University of Wisconsin at Madison had a model a-la-carte programme "which let the customers

achieve more flexibility in what they were doing.

"There are built-in securities for the customer," said Brooks. "The onus is on the food service to sell you the food."

The difference, of course, is that last year you could stuff yourself with cake, salad and milk. This year, the high cost of individual items restricts such purchases.

"Nobody's blaming Versa for the high prices," Brooks commented. "Mrs. Plumtre can't tell you why prices are rising, so nobody expects me to."

"In April we budgeted an increase of 8 per cent for this year, twice what our budget had been the year before. But by August, the prices had already increased by 16.7 per cent."

The reason resident students must join the plan is to give Versa "a certain amount of known revenue, so that we can make an intelligent budget predicting for the coming year," Brooks said.

Waste eliminated

One of the problems eliminated by the voucher system is waste. "The meal card system forced people to become lackadaisical."

"They were taking stuff so they wouldn't have to make a second trip back to the servery."

"With this (voucher) system, there's no waste, and a considerable saving. With the turnstiles we've set up at the entrances, there's less theft as well," he said.

And the plastic cutlery cuts down on the cost of dishwashers.

Brooks returned to the topic of the \$420 10-meal plan.

He said he tries to come up with a special for each meal, to satisfy basic nutritional needs and provide the most food for the least cost.

"I thought 300 out of 1,500 would take me up on it, but 700 or 800 responded. It shows that a lot of people are hard up for money, and that they realize the cost."

He said he placed resident students above all other diners, and tries to do "a lot of special things."

"We have special dinners to break the monotony, and we try to assist various groups having parties."



Lyn Brooks of Food Services

Grape boycott supported

Brooks responds to student suggestions. He took the cherries off the cottage cheese, supplied crunchy granola, exchanged the orange juice on the cole slaw for raisins and nuts, and pulled grapes off the shelves to support the grape boycott.

"In my opinion, the majority of students on campus are pro-boycott," he explained. "If a professor comes in and wants grapes, he can go to Dominion, because we don't have them here."

He has stocked peanut butter on the condiment table, put home-made cookies in the dessert line-up, and planned a salad bar with raw vegetables, with 15, 20 and 25 cent dishes.

His motto is customer participation. "I have to work here. Nobody likes being jeered or sneered at. I'm the guy in the middle, but that's what I'm paid to be."

His office is in 045 McLaughlin, which is where student suggestions should be forwarded, via mail. (You don't need a stamp if you mail you note on campus.)

Meanwhile, some people are still very dissatisfied with the meal plan set-up. One student on Tuesday was standing in the Central Square cafeteria with a handful of scrip, trying to sell it at face value to diners as they approached the cashier.

Nobody was buying.

... and where all that money goes

By COLAN INGLIS

Do you have the feeling that your on-campus meals were planned and prepared by that famous Greek chef Mediocrates?

University food services, a division of ancillary enterprises, controls the distribution of food on campus. Versafood is only the caterer. N.D. Crandles, assistant director of An-

cillary Services, supervises hours and levels of services, prices, purchase and maintenance of equipment, advertising, transportation, and heat and light.

Lyn Brooks, director of Versafood, is in charge of catering. Versa hires staff, buys and prepares food, negotiates salaries, and cleans the serveries and kitchens under the terms of its "managerial" contract.

For "managerial expertise" Versa receives 3.5 per cent of total gross receipts, approximately \$57,000 last year. According to Lyn Brooks, half of this is profit. The remainder goes for recipe development, market research, and lost interest due to the fact that Versa pays all bills and then charges the university one month later.

Versa is also contractually required to return a profit of \$106,000 to the university after meeting expenses.

To do this, Brooks has cut staff, negotiated a "good union contract," and introduced general economies.

A proposal to close one servery and two dining halls in complex one and a hall in complex two as an economy move was met with hostility by college masters.

Closing Bethune's specialty restaurant has been proposed, and this has also been criticized by the master. According to Brooks, these operations are being maintained at the expense of the general quality of service and food.

Further quality reductions result from the department of physical plant's charges for heat, light, maintenance and

transportation, a "sore point" with Brooks. Transportation charges are billed for an eight hour period even if the driver works less.

The services of tradesmen are also overcharged, said Brooks. Last May, when a sandwich heater was moved from Osgoode to the Buttery, physical plant charged \$50 but when it was returned this September the charge was \$272.

The physical plant estimate for maintenance, heat and light includes all costs plus a 12 per cent surcharge. Crandles said this situation is "under study."

This year's projected budget deficit of \$107,600 has resulted in further administration pressure to cut expenditures. The equipment portion of the budget has been reduced to a level that leaves necessary equipment lacking.

The department of health has reportedly warned the university to start refrigerating the sandwiches in the serveries or face a shutdown. Much of the equipment is in poor condition, causing frequent breakdowns, according to Brooks.



Caroline Reed dines on Versafood.

Reporter Inglis samples food

The gastronomic delights of the Central Square cafeteria were sampled during dinner Nov. 13 by this reporter.

Featured were roast turkey, mashed potatoes, and green beans.

The meal got off to a bad start when my tray was discovered to be awash in dishwasher.

I confronted the proposed meal: turned-up sliced turkey roll saturated in the water in which it had been boiled. Despite the warning coming from my stomach, I took the plunge.

Beverage was a half pint of grape drink, and dessert a container of orange yogurt. Check-out through the cashier was speedy and I took my

place at one of the few seats available. The table and seat were clean and dry.

Mushy green beans and a highly peppered gravy were notable faults, but common to most institutional cooking.

Total cost: \$1.52, plus a package of Tums.