

Scrip system under study

Hi-tech scrip may be in the cards

by Gilbert Bouchard

U of A Housing and Food Services is studying a proposal to replace the present scrip system with a computerized meal card system.

The U of A currently uses a dollar per dollar value coupon scrip system. The student pays a lump sum at the beginning of the term and is issued the equivalent amount of scrip. Scrip coupons are honoured as cash at any Housing and Food outlet.

Housing and Food director Gail Brown, Food Manager Jim Fougere, two students from the Food Committee, and SU Housing and Transportation commissioner Grant Borbridge travelled to four mid-western U.S. universities earlier this month to study alternative food systems.

The delegation was impressed by the computer meal card system.

"Our main purpose on our trip was to look at alternative programs to the scrip system," said Borbridge.

"The way the trend seems to be going is toward what is called a meal access card, which is a computer card," said Borbridge. "Each cash register has a computer reader which debits the amount from your food account, somewhat like a bank debit card."

Under this system, the student would be issued a card and will be able to buy various amounts of "meal credit."

But Borbridge sees a drawback. "The loss of transferability is one drawback to the system, since you will no longer be able to sell or give away scrip to other students" he says, "but you will be able to transfer your scrip to other card holders."

Borbridge added that Housing

and Food promises to alleviate the loss of transferability by having enough variations on the levels of board commitments that students would never be forced to buy more credit than they use personally.

The advantages to the computer system are numerous, says Borbridge:

- The convenience of not having to carry and use scrip coupons.
- Line-ups at the cash registers at Housing and Food cafeterias should be reduced substantially since all that need be done is to insert a card, no more scrip to count and to make change for at the till.
- Off-campus students will be able to buy into the system.
- Students will be able to see the discount on their purchase at the till. Students get a discount for scrip but don't see it on a meal by meal basis.
- Off-campus students will also get a discount if they buy into the system.
- Housing and Food will be able to keep better track of their revenues and should be able to better project food costs.

"Since Housing and Food Services will be able to better project

their food costs" said Borbridge, "they should be able to eliminate some of their waste."

Borbridge added that the administrative advantages are phenomenal. "Records are easier to keep, and with the improved projections they should be able to reduce board prices."

He said, "While the original outlay is great, Housing and Food hopes the advantages to students will offset the costs."

Card systems are implemented at a number of institutions in North America. The systems studied by the U of A delegation were at DePaul University and Northwestern University in Chicago, Anderson College in Anderson, Indiana, and the University of Wisconsin.

"We looked at three different companies with three different systems, with three different capabilities, and we will be contacting many more," said Borbridge.

Borbridge will be meeting further with Brown, Fougere, the other student representatives and others from Housing and Food Services.

The proposal then will go to the Housing and Food Services Administrative Council and ultimately to the Board of Governors.

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Young said the problem faced by his service is acquiring space for new copying areas.

"We were fortunate in getting a high-profile area like CAB," said Young.

According to Young, there is a big need on campus for dependable copiers. But vandalism and misuse of the copiers has been a problem,

pushing up maintenance costs, said Young.

At present, there are tentative plans to put three or four more copiers in SUB.

Both Young and university reprobographic consultant Steve White emphasized that the copi-card system makes copying less expensive and more convenient for students.

The response to the copi-card system was favorable so far, said White.

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Mrs. E.A. Solomon,
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Yard Apes

by Hans Beckers



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