A Report on Food Services at Trent University

Presented by the Trent Central Student Association
Executive Summary

The following report provides an analysis of student opinion regarding food services at Trent University, as well as recommending a direction for improving those services. Methods of data collection include a broad-based opinion survey of the Trent campus community and a comparison of Trent University food services to food services at comparable institutions across Canada.

In the survey, 661 participants from the Trent community were asked the question: “What would you like to see changed about food on campus?” At no point during the study was the current primary food service provider mentioned or alluded to. This question was selected due to its open-ended nature that reduced the influence of leading questions. The data was digitized by two teams of volunteers and then cross-compared to increase accuracy in translating the data. Responses to the survey were summarized into the following seven themes:

- Variety of Foods
- Access to and Quality of Healthy Foods
- An Inability to Access Dietary Needs
- Quality of Service
- Greater Emphasis on Sustainability
- Cost
- Diverse Food Requests

The report found that 97% of the Trent community is unsatisfied with the current food service, 2.5% offered “no comment”, and 0.5% offered positive comments. Access to quality healthy foods, variety of foods, and the cost of food at Trent were the top three issues. Further, Trent University’s peer institutions have found solutions to these common problems to create food services that cater to the needs of the campus.

The report includes twelve recommendations for the improvement of food services at Trent University, with the ultimate goal of creating food services that meet the needs of students and increase campus-wide satisfaction. These recommendations have been drafted with consultations from food service professionals, food justice advocates, and food producers.
Methodologies

The survey was conducted over a period of five days in late November 2011. Volunteers stood outside of the Wenjack Lecture Theatre as well as in the Champlain College Great Hall at varied times throughout the day with poster boards and markers, asking those who passed by “WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE ABOUT FOOD ON CAMPUS?” The survey question did not reference Trent University’s current primary food service provider, Aramark, and volunteers were told explicitly not to mention Aramark or any other food service provider on campus unless asked a question directly.

The question was selected due to this open-ended nature, as well as to reduce any bias towards the current food service providers. The open ended nature of this question, although difficult for data analysis, minimized the influence of a ‘leading question’ and harnessed the creativity of those participating in developing data.

The submissions were separated into eight common themed categories, which were further broken down into subcategories to further refine the data. The categories and their subcategories can be found in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More Variety</td>
<td>Explicit Request for More Fruits and Vegetables, Options Beyond Aramark, More Diverse Ingredient List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthier Foods</td>
<td>Effects of Food on Health, Insufficient Healthy Options, Request for Nutritional Information, Healthy Food is Too Expensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to Address Dietary Needs</td>
<td>Vegetarian, Medical Requirements, Halal, Adequate Substitutions, Diary Free Hours, Staffing, Meal Plans, Aramark Specific, Space, and Quality of Food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Service</td>
<td>Positive/ No Change Service, Food, Other Organic, Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive/ No Change</td>
<td>Service, Food, Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Emphasis on</td>
<td>Organic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too Expensive</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for More Representative Foods</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After five days of engaging with students, the process to digitize the results began. To ensure accuracy, the interpretation of the submissions was done in a highly controlled manner. Four volunteers started analysing the data as a group to develop a standardise interpretation of the results. For example a common submission: “HEALTHY FOOD IS TOO EXPENSIVE” was agreed to be classified as a comment regarding “HEALTH” as the “EXPENSIVE” refers to healthy food and it would be an assumption that the “EXPENSIVE” comment applied to all food.
After developing a standard to examine the data, the four volunteers broke into two groups and transcribed the submission digitally and separated them into eight categories as seen in Table 1. The two groups then began to cross-reference their interpretation. There were a total of 21 (out of 661, or 3.12%) incidents when the two groups did not agree on the categorisation. In these incidences the data was categorised as a group of four.

Within each category there still remained a high degree of variability. For example within the “HEALTH” category there were contradicting statements between “NO HEALTHY FOOD OPTIONS” and “HEALTHY FOOD OPTIONS ARE TOO EXPENSIVE”. This was addressed by further breaking down the data into subcategories to clarify the numerous themes.

Upon completion of the digitization and categorisation, three key themes were identified from the data and selected for more thorough research. These concerns were investigated further in a Trent context, and research was conducted into how they are addressed on campuses across Canada. The universities selected for cross-comparative research were determined by one of two categories: those that are comparable to Trent in character and demographics, and universities that have demonstrated innovative new approaches to food delivery on campus. This enabled the data analysis to root our recommendations the practises of Trent University’s peer institutions throughout Canada.

Upon the completion of gathering and analyzing the data, a series of recommendations were formulated through a comprehensive consultation process with stakeholders, including students, food producers, food justice advocates, and food service professionals.
Results

The survey had a total of 661 respondents (n=661), representing 8% of Symon’s Campus students, faculty, and staff. The data from the survey was broken down into eight categories. The results of the breakdown can be found in Chart 1.

Chart 1: Breakdown of Survey Responses by Category

Breakdown by Category

Within each category there was a potential for a further break down of the results, which can be used to develop a broader understanding of the concerns of students. This sub-categorization was conducted for the three largest response categories: “MORE VARIETY”, “HEALTHIER FOODS”, and “HIGHER QUALITY OF SERVICE”.

These results can be found in Chart 2, Chart 3, and Chart 4.
Chart 2: Categorisation of Responses Regarding Variety of Foods

Responses Regarding Request for Increased Variety

- More Diverse Ingredient List: 55%
- More Diverse Food Selection: 34%
- Options Beyond Aramark: 11%

Chart 3: Categorisation of Responses Regarding Service

Responses Regarding Quality of Service

- Quality of Food: 41%
- Aramark Specific: 23%
- Hours: 19%
- Staffing: 9%
- Meal Plans: 6%
- Space: 2%
The also study compared three characteristics of food service providers on ten campuses across the country. The characteristics compared were chosen because they addressed concerns of variety, service, and nutrition/health, the three primary concerns of survey respondents.

The campuses were determined based upon similarity to Trent University by total enrolment and location to the surrounding community. The study also includes a selection of universities that exhibited exemplary and innovative food service models. The results from this comparison can be found in the Table 2. All of the information included in Table 2 was found on the individual food service websites of the universities in question.
Indicates that select information is available. For example, Trent University has no nutritional or ingredient information during the summer, or doing the Fall and Winter semesters only selected service outlets offer information online.

The University of Winnipeg was initially considered for comparison. However, after examining the food services on this campus, we determined that their system is simply not comparable on these metrics. Rather, the food services at the University of Winnipeg offered an innovative and dynamic approach that was found worthy of making note of in this document.

Food services at the University of Winnipeg, called Diversity Food Service, are a “joint venture of the University of Winnipeg's Community Renewal Corporation's (UWCRC) & Supporting Employment and Economic Development (SEED) Winnipeg to deliver excellent food services to the University of Winnipeg while providing meaningful

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Flex Dollars Can be Spent Off-Campus</th>
<th>Percent of Nutritional Information</th>
<th>Ingredients Used in Meals</th>
<th>Provider</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Windsor</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>In House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McMaster</td>
<td>Off-Campus Flex Plan</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>In House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brock</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Sodexo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandon</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>In House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakehead</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>~60%*</td>
<td>60%*</td>
<td>Aramark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lethbridge</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Sodexo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterloo</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>In House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nipissing</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Information Not Available</td>
<td>Information Not Available</td>
<td>Aramark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trent</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>~40%*</td>
<td>0%*</td>
<td>Aramark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurentian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>~50%*</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>Aramark</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Indicates that select information is available. For example, Trent University has no nutritional or ingredient information during the summer, or doing the Fall and Winter semesters only selected service outlets offer information online.
employment and ownership opportunities for the community.”\textsuperscript{1} This integrated approach supports the campus community, as well as non-profit work combating urban poverty and supporting the local Winnipeg community.

Moreover, Diversity Food Services also has a commitment to the sustainability of the local food economy and the environment through “menus… based on seasonality and availability of regional fresh products [and sourcing] fresh, seasonal, local and organic produce as a first choice and preference.”\textsuperscript{2}

Diversity Food Service also offers a high level of flexibility in meal plan options for students. All plans are based on a declining balance flex system, but all students (including those living in Residence) are able to choose their meal plan amount. A Trent University model emulating the elements of Diversity Food Services would address many of the concerns raised by survey respondents.

\textsuperscript{1} Diversity Food Services, \textit{About Diversity Food Services} http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/index/food-services-overview.
\textsuperscript{2} Diversity Food Services, \textit{Kitchen Standards} http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/index/food-services-standards.
Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of the data collection indicate that the Trent University Symon’s Campus community is largely dissatisfied with the status quo. The concerns are varied, but the most conclusive result of this study is that the Trent community is ready to see change in food services at Trent University.

The following recommendations systematically address the varied concerns found through the data collection and processing. These recommendations are selected to increase satisfaction with any food service provider contracted to provide services on Trent University’s Symons Campus.

Recommendation 1: Increase the number of autonomous food service outlets on campus excluded from the primary food contract.

Rationale: Under the current food contract, students, faculty and staff have limited options regarding who provides the food they consume on campus. Currently, all of the residential college dining areas, as well as most of the small food service outlets on campus, are operated by Aramark without competition. Only the Seasoned Spoon Café, the Ceilie Pub, and the Planet Bakery North offer day-to-day alternatives to Aramark, and some of these operate under tight restrictions and without access to the meal plan.

The inability to acquire a diverse menu on campus is the single largest statement in the survey results; 33% of all respondents requested more options in the food served. Of those requesting a more diverse menu, 55% (18.2% of all respondents) had such varied requests in changes to the menu that the data suggests that no one food service provider is capable of meeting all of our campus needs.

More than 1 in 20 students clearly stated they desired to see no more Aramark at Trent.

Action Items:

- The new contract must protect the current exclusion areas on campus;
- We recommend the following food service kiosks be operated as exclusion areas:
  - The Bata library café
  - The coffee stall in Gzowski College
  - The coffee stall in the DNA Building

  We would recommend that local and student run businesses be encouraged to place bids for those areas;
- All new buildings developed during the time of the food service contract should be awarded through an open-bid process;
- Traill College remain outside the food service contract;
- Trent In Oshawa be afforded the opportunity to develop their own food service tender process.

Recommendation 2: Put more “flex” in “flex dollars” by allowing students to use flex dollars at a diversity of food service outlets across campus and in Peterborough.
**Rationale:** The results from the survey indicate that one of the largest concerns with the current food services on campus is the lack of variety and diversity in the meals offered. The diverse needs of our campus seemingly cannot be met with one exclusive food provider. By allowing students to spend their monies at a variety of food service outlets, Trent can begin to address the complaints of 33% of the total survey respondents.

In addition, one third of the universities studied in the cross-comparison offer options for students to spend meal plan monies off campus, thus indicating that such a system is possible.

**Action Items:**

- Develop a transparent, outlined method of offering a flex dollar option, available to all food service providers on campus at a neutral-net cost to the provider;
- Investigate the possibility of integrating flex dollars into the downtown community; including downtown restaurants and grocery stores.

**Recommendation 3:** Ensure that all eating areas and cafeterias are common spaces and are accessible without financial cost.

**Rationale:** Trent University has recognized that we struggle with a lack of student space on Symon’s Campus. In *Radical Recovery: An Academic Plan for Trent University (2012-2015)*, “The committee [recommended]… that student space and new lecture theatres be recognized as a priority.” We have space on campus that could be used as common space, but is not accessible to students without a financial cost. For example, students must purchase a board meal to enter Robinson Dining Hall in Gzowski College.

**Action Items:**

- Remove the entry fee for all dining areas on campus;
- Ensure that all current and future dining areas are mandated to be free and accessible to all students.

**Recommendation 4:** Make nutritional information and ingredient lists available online for all menu items.

**Rationale:** In our survey, 36% of students who cited health as their primary concern submitted a response requesting nutritional information. Currently, approximately 40% of the Aramark menu has nutritional information available online (when taking into account that during Spring and Summer semesters have 0% of nutritional information is available online) Students need to know about the nutritional information and ingredients about their foods in order to make informed, healthy dietary choices.

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Six of the ten campuses investigated for this study were found to have all nutritional information available, including: McMaster, University of Windsor, Brock University, Brandon University, Lethbridge University, and Waterloo University.

**Action Items:**

- Require that any new food service provider make the nutritional content and ingredient lists for all their meals readily accessible;
- Publish nutritional information in comparison to the Canada Food Guide so students can make informed and balanced dietary decisions.

**Recommendation 5:** The food service provider must ensure that all students, faculty, staff, and visitors are able to access fully nutritional meals regardless of their dietary constraints.

**Rationale:** The Trent community is comprised of a diversity of individuals with a diversity of dietary needs and restrictions. Everyone at Trent ought to be able to access meals that meet their dietary needs and are fully balanced and nutritionally adequate. However, one third (33%) of survey respondents indicated that such meals are not available to them.

The results of the survey indicated that current food services offer a lack of full, balanced meal options for students that are vegetarian, vegan, require Halal foods, or have medical dietary restrictions and/or food allergies. In short, the food provided on campus falls short of meeting the needs of our diverse community and alternative options are frequently inadequate and nutritionally lacking.

**Action Items:**

- Mandate that full and/or comparable vegetarian and vegan meals are available at all full-food service locations at all meal times and that these options include vital nutrients, including vegetarian protein;
- Mandate that Halal foods and other culturally required food options are available at all locations at all meals;
- Diversify menu options for students with gluten, corn, soy, or nut allergies;
- Ensure that all attempts to meet the diverse needs of students not be simply done by eliminating meat/pork for the meal without an adequate substitution.

**Recommendation 6:** A Charter of Student Food Rights be developed and implemented with broad pan-campus involvement.

**Rationale:** Unsurprisingly, students are the primary demographic served by on campus food providers. Residence meal plans alone account for over $3.5 million of the monies collected by Aramark each academic year. Thus, students ought to have their rights upheld by the University food contract. Having access to diverse, nutritional, culturally sensitive, and sustainable food options are regarded as rights by the TCSA. Moreover, students ought to have grounds on which these rights can be upheld if the student feels
the food service provider has violated their rights. The current Trent University Charter of Student Rights and Responsibilities, a document that ought to govern food services, fails mentions food once\(^5\).

**Action Items:**

- Elected student representatives from the TCSA, Part-Time Student Association (PTSA), Graduate Student Association (GSA), and College Cabinets work in collaboration to formulate a Charter of Student Food Rights. The Charter will then be proposed to the Housing and Food Services committee of CASSC for approval;
- The University will work to uphold all food service providers to this charter.

**Recommendation 7:** Potential food service providers must agree to work with elected student representatives and the University, in consultation with local stakeholders, to develop a local procurement policy.

**Rationale:** To 5% of survey respondents, having more local, sustainable food options is their primary concern. The TCSA recognizes that what is or is not considered “local” can be ambiguous. It is necessary to develop a local procurement policy specific to Trent and Peterborough and the Kawarthas region. We feel that the TCSA and the University have stake in developing a Trent-specific policy, as availability and viability of local purchasing is highly dependent on the locale. Moreover, having a policy specific to our University will uphold our ideals as a sustainable campus and affirm our commitment to supporting our local community and decreasing our ecological footprint.

**Action Items:**

- The food service provider, the University, the TCSA, and local stakeholders such as Kawartha’s Choice and the Cattleman’s Association collaboratively develop a local procurement policy;
- The policy will investigate seasonal availability of produce, storage of local produce for use in the winter, and the possibility of switching our beef inspection certifications from federal to provincially inspected beef, as this will support our local beef industry;
- The definition of “local” be clearly laid out in the new contract as locally grown and produced;
- The University make a commitment to prioritizing local foods whenever seasonally and financially possible.

**Recommendation 8:** Change the current monopoly for on-campus catering to a system of “open tender.”

**Rationale:** Under the current food contract, almost all catering on campus must be done by Aramark (with the exception of several areas in Champlain College that can be catered

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by the Seasoned Spoon Café and the Ceilie Pub). This is extremely limiting because it
does not allow groups on campus the autonomy to seek catering services that best fit their
needs. In the past, Aramark catering services have proved inadequate to meet the specific
needs of a group. One of the most recent examples of Aramark’s failure to address the
needs a specific catering event is the contract breech at the 35th Annual Indigenous
Elders’ Gathering. At this Gathering in February of 2012, Aramark was contracted to
provide culturally appropriate foods, but failed to deliver on that contract by refusing to
provide a meal specific to the conference.

The TCSA feels as though all catering contracts on campus should be available for open-
tender on and event-by-event basis. The primary food service provider reserves the right
to put a catering bid in, but local catering companies or student run business ought to be
given an equitable chance at receiving catering contracts.

**Action Items:**

- In the new food service contract, the new provider should agree to have equitable
  standing amongst other catering companies for catering contracts;
- The limitations and barriers for current on-campus catering companies (the
  Seasoned Spoon Café and the Ceilie Pub) be lifted;
- Groups hoping to have an event catered on campus must notify the food service
  provider and allow the provider to put a bid in if they so desire. However, the
groups may also seek offers from other providers and reserve the right to choose
the provider that best meets their needs.

**Recommendation 9:** Ensure that whenever classes are being held, students have the
opportunity to eat on campus both before and after their classes.

**Rationale:** Currently, Trent holds classes beginning at 8:00 AM. However, there are no
food services outlets open on campus prior to this time, meaning students that live in
residence have no opportunity to eat before their classes. Having the opportunity to eat
prior to classes is necessary to maintain student well being. In addition, 19% of students
indicating dissatisfaction with service noted hours of operation as their primary concern.

**Action Items:**

- Develop a policy that ensures that a food service outlet is open at least one hour
  prior to the start of classes and at least one hour after the end of classes every day;
- Ensure that Trent University, rather than the food service provider, be responsible
  for managing the hours of operation.

**Recommendation 10:** Develop a centralized location to post food-related information.

**Rationale:** Under the status quo, there is no single location that is updated frequently, or
accurately, for the food service provider to communicate with students. This leads to poor
communication and confusion around food service issues, including changes to hours of
operation, nutritional information, and allergen information.
Action Items:

- The new food service provider must develop a centralized electronic location to post information that is updated on a daily basis;
- The food communication forum should include items such as weekly menus with nutritional information, ingredient lists, and allergen information. It should also include hours of operation and any pertinent food service updates.

Recommendation 11: An investigation into the impacts of food served on campus to health be conducted.

Rationale: Through our surveying, the TCSA found that 18% of the campus community is concerned about the impact of the food on their health. Students have many health needs, and oftentimes these are not met by the food on campus. Moreover, much of the food served is high in saturated fats, cholesterol, sodium, and sugar, amongst other substances, that could negatively impact student health. However, this report alone is insufficient in scope to address the impacts of food served at Trent on health. Thus, we recommend that a comprehensive investigation into the impacts of food served on campus to health be conducted.

Action Items:

- The University, in consultation with the food service provider and the TCSA, launch comprehensive investigation into the impacts of food served on campus to student health. A focus should be placed on the Canada Food Guide and how our food does and does not fulfill the guidelines. Additionally, the investigation should look into the impacts of high cholesterol, sodium, sugar, and saturated fat diets on health;
- A report be formulated from the investigation, along with recommendations for improving student health on campus through modifying food options. The food service provider will be asked to fulfill these requirements.

Recommendation 12: Current Aramark staff unionized with CUPE 3205 be given priority hiring and the rights to maintain their union status.

Rationale: In all of the positive comments received in the survey, Aramark staff was commended for their friendly, prompt, and professional service. Though we are seeking to change food services at Trent University, this does not have to come at the cost of the current unionized staff loosing their jobs.

Action Items:

- The new food service provider must first offer service positions to current food service staff at Trent University;
- The food service workers must be given the right to stay unionized, with CUPE 3205 as their bargaining unit.
Works Cited


