



FACULTY SENATE

MEMORANDUM

Date: March 28, 2019

To: Chancellor Andrew Rogerson and Cabinet
Faculty Senate

From: Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate

Re Concerns about Dining Services

Number: FSM-2019-02

We were disappointed to return to school this January and find the situation in the cafeteria unchanged: eStem students are crowding UA Little Rock faculty, students, and staff out of the DSC dining areas; and the Trojan Cafe cafeteria (including the conference room 205G) is itself off-limits unless one buys a full meal.

This situation is untenable, and we look forward to a resolution on this issue. Once the eStem students get their own dining area, we also look forward to the return of the cafeteria to an open campus space. However, even if the eStem students are moved out of DSC, and even if the Trojan Cafe doors are open to all, there will continue to be a problem with dining services. Long before the eStem crisis highlighted concerns, Sodexo and the University made policy decisions that damaged the ability of the dining services to contribute to the educational mission of the university.

The biggest problem was the decision to change to an all-you-can eat full-meal food plan in the main cafeteria. What this means is that no one can just get a cup of coffee or a salad or a piece of fruit in the main dining hall on campus. The only way to get individual *a la carte* items in the DSC is in the food court. Unfortunately, the food court is not large enough to handle the

demand. It is much smaller than the main cafeteria, yet it is the only option for the majority of students, faculty, staff, and visitors. All one finds there are fast food, limited options, and long lines.

While the full-meal plan model works well at more traditional campuses, it is not appropriate as the model for the central dining facility in a metropolitan campus such as UA Little Rock.

The majority of UA Little Rock students commute to campus. They need a place to stay while here. Many have time between classes, and a cafeteria could be a place to gather and make friends, meet with a faculty member over a cup of coffee and a snack, or get together with other students over lunch to work on a group project. It is obvious the new system requiring purchase of a full meal to even enter the premises makes such interactions impossible. People who bring their lunch or purchase from the food court cannot eat with those who buy their lunch. What may not be so obvious is that as long as there is no *a la carte* dining in the cafeteria, such interactions are also limited since the dining hall no longer invites casual meetings and conversations.

The full meal plan is also not appropriate for UA Little Rock's adult, non-traditional population. Forty-five percent of our students are over 24. Most are not interested in full meal plans. Indeed, in a state with one of the highest obesity rates in the country, the University should be promoting a much more healthy diet for its students, faculty, and staff--not all-you-can-eat buffets and fast food. The university has invested a lot in fitness programs, encouraging us to eat more healthy foods. The current dining options are inconsistent with those efforts.

We recognize that Sodexo prefers the full meal plan option since it provides a more stable, consistent income stream. But we know there are other campuses like ours, with large non-traditional student populations, who are able to make a more flexible dining service work. We therefore respectfully ask that you bring together a group including Sodexo, University administrators, students, faculty, and staff to develop options more consistent with the mission of the university and the needs of its students, faculty, and staff. The largest, most central dining space on campus should be returned to open access; and the contract with Sodexo should be renegotiated to include *a la carte* dining as well as full meals in that space.

Now, as plans to address the eStem situation are moving forward, we have an opportunity to make positive changes to the dining hall space and meal plan options. We look forward to discussing the possibilities.