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# Dining on Campus in 2021

**Matt Parks, Staff Reporter**

Given that most students returned to campus this fall, Seattle University adapted to once again provide full on-campus dining options for members of the campus community.

Before the start of each quarter, students select a meal plan, which provides dining dollars to be utilized at various places on campus including Cherry Street Market, The Byte and the new Convergence Zone. As the end of fall quarter approaches, the Seattle U community reacts to the dining options and provides insight into the adjustments that have been made this quarter.

Resident District Manager for Redhawk Dining Terry Conaty revealed that planning this quarter's options revolved around the CDC and local government's guidelines. He is pleased with what was allowed.

"We were extremely happy to learn that students would be able to sit and eat together again in our dining spaces—this was one of the biggest take-aways from the overall food experience in 2021," Conaty wrote in a statement to The Spectator. "Safety and social distancing were still a significant priority for us, [and] moving some of our concepts around ... allowed us to maintain proper crowd control as required by local ordinance."

Even with the COVID-19 pandemic affecting the planning process, Conaty shared that Redhawk Dining was still able to introduce new food options, partnering with local Indian and Mexican restaurants, NaanSense and Solamente. They also offered weekend all-you-can-eat buffets, added fried chicken to Absurd Bird and expanded the Wild Blue sushi and poke bowl offerings. In addition, bubble tea was added to The Bottom Line's menu.

The biggest addition this quarter was the Convergence Zone located in the Center for Science and Innovation. The all plant-based dining option is "designed for students and faculty to gather together and enjoy an entirely plant-based cuisine," Conaty wrote. Each brand is specifically to "champion global sustainability and better plant-based eating."

With all the different places to eat on campus, first-year Psychology major Ellie LaRiviere Koempel gives a breakdown of her dining experiences.

"I have tried most places in C-street and so far everything has been okay," Koempel wrote in a statement to The Spectator. "Nothing has been mind blowing, but it also hasn't been bad. I think Absurd Bird is my favorite place, but I also like the sushi a lot. [Red Hot] Rudy's is good, but inconsistent."

An issue that arose this quarter surrounded meal plans. Midway through, many students found themselves with a high balance and were scrambling to spend their dining dollars as only \$250 are usually allowed to roll over to next quarter's funds.



Jordie Simpson

Vegan food options ready to be served.

This expectation produced heightened anxiety as many students were staying home after Thanksgiving break, as recommended by the university. To help students spend their meal plans, a campus pop-up store was added at Tu Taco offering campus merchandise.

While fourth-year Interdisciplinary Liberal Studies major JP Newmann doesn't have a meal plan currently, he still hears about the struggles of underclassmen and remembers what it was like trying to reach the maximum rollover amount, even without losing two weeks on campus.

"A lot of my friends at UREC are underclassmen ... and all of them talk about this problem of just having too much money and basically getting two weeks out [because of going online]," Newmann said. "As a result, they're trying to get rid of it by going to places like the store and spending \$60 on a shirt, which I think is ridiculous. Given the options and given how much people actually eat here, it's just not feasible [to reach a \$250 rollover]. And I know when I was younger, even being here until the end of fall quarter, that was a lot to try and get to."

Housing and Residence Life announced Nov. 19 in an email that for this quarter only, the rollover amount would be raised to \$500.

Director of Campus Services Dion Wade shared that the decision to raise the amount that rolled over was influenced by a variety of factors, including the State of Washington's guidance for allowing in-person dining and Seattle U's shift online for the final weeks of the quarter.

"We heard from students that it was a challenge for some to spend all of their meal plan this quarter—therefore the university made the decision to allow students to roll over additional funds for use during the winter quarter," Wade wrote in a statement to The Spectator. "Many students graciously opted to donate some funds to the campus food security program, and in partnership with the Campus Store, Redhawk Dining offered an end-of-term merchandise sale that gave students the opportunity to stock up on school spirit swag and early holiday presents for family members."

Prior to the increase in the rollover amount, students were worried they would not be able to spend enough money to reach the previous \$250 amount that would roll over.

First-year Computer Science major Castel Villalobos detailed what the situation was like for him as he tried to navigate spending his meal plan.

"Managing my meal plan was a bit difficult at times," Villalobos wrote in a statement to The Spectator. "Because of my eating schedule, I was worried that I would have too much money left over. For me, everything being overpriced was beneficial. Towards the end of the quarter, having the Seattle U campus store at C-Street that accepted dining dollars was really helpful in spending some of my money."

Although the increase of the rollover amount is a relief for students, this last-minute announcement affected students differently with the consensus among students that it should have been made at an earlier date.

"My mom would have been really mad at me if I had money left that didn't transfer over, so I spent it on stuff I didn't need, but then they announced we could keep \$500," Koempel said. "They should not have made that announcement only a week before we left, it should have been a lot longer ago."

First-year Criminal Justice major Kirsten Brown agreed that the raising of the rollover amount should have been made known sooner.

"I think the school saying that \$500 could roll over should've been announced a lot sooner than it was because some of my friends were scrambling to spend money on their cards," Brown wrote in a statement to The Spectator.

Redhawk Dining reports that along with the rest of the country, staff shortages have been a struggle during the pandemic, and job openings for 2022 can be found here. It's been a learning curve for all in navigating how to spend meal plans and maintain a safe and enjoyable dining experience.