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UCONN BUSINESS STUDENT CREATES

DINING HALL APP

FOCUSED ON NUTRITION

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Sean Howard, a second-semester business undecided major, was talking to his roommate about how there was no streamlined way to track the nutritional data of the food being served in the dining halls.

So, he decided to take the matter into his own hands and create an app called Swipe that includes the menus of all eight dining halls and campus retail locations, and the nutritional data of the food.

This includes listing the calories, carbs, fat, sugar and protein, among other nutritional data, on each food item that is being served, and rates them based on the individual's nutritional goals. For those who have food restrictions or allergies or prioritizing a specific diet for fitness or health, a user can indicate that on the app, and the ratings of the food will change.

"We came to the consensus that menus and nutritional facts accessibility was lacking at the university," Howard said. "So, I came up with an idea to make an app that made it easier to track menus [and] nutritional data, basically just make nutrition and food more accessible for students."

He began creating the app in November and it launched at the end of February. When the Daily Campus talked with Howard at the beginning of March, he had 500 users. He said his goal at the end of the semester is 2,000.

While he coded the project independently, he worked with UConn Dining Services and Student Health and Wellness (SHaW) Nutrition Services to ensure that the product was appropriate for all students.

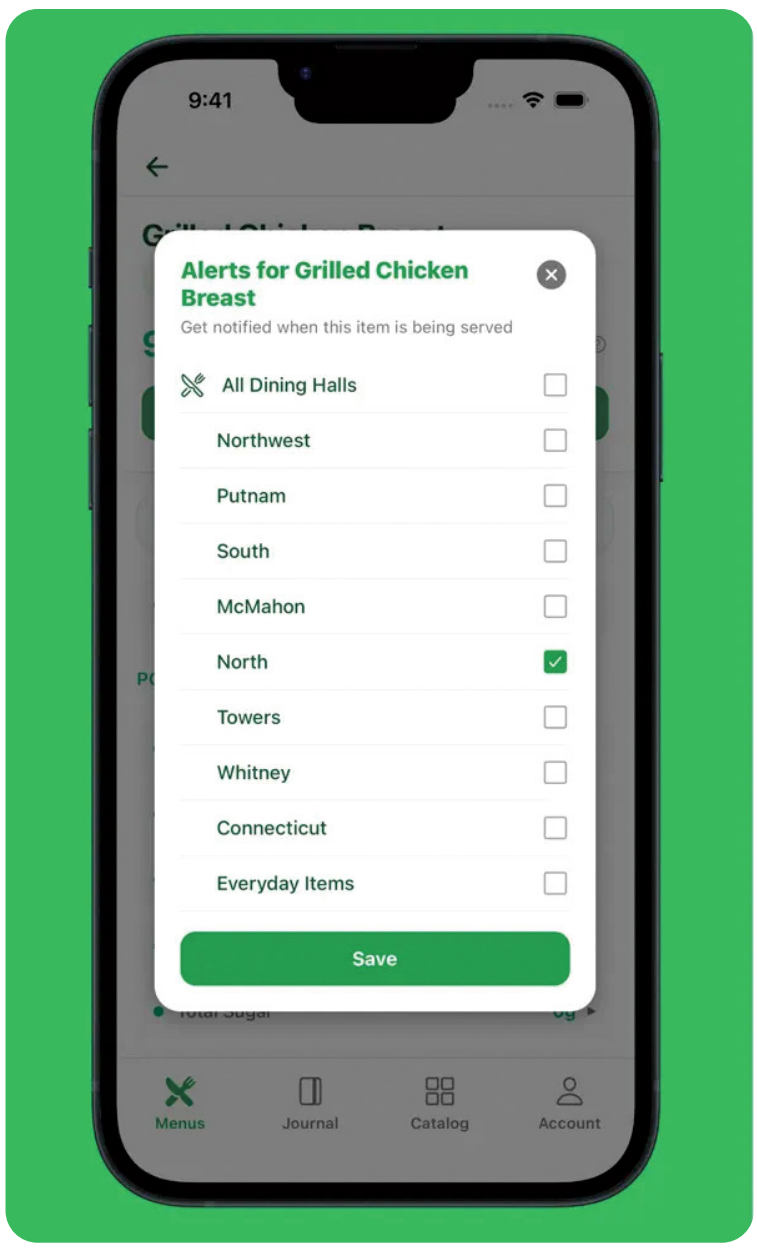
"Our goal in working with Sean was to assist in narrowing the scope of the project into manageable development sections [and] tackling difficult topics that need to be considered when providing nutritional information," said Michael White, executive director of Dining Services.

White said him and Howard reached out to Dietician Lilly Tartsinis at SHaW to make sure that eating disorders, elimination diets, allergies and medical changes were taken into thoughtful consideration with the app.

"We don't want students to avoid certain foods simply because it doesn't score well in the algorithm," White said. "In some cases, pure consumption is more important than if it hits the latest trend on protein or fiber scoring."

There is a wellness mode on the app which turns off the ratings and has a positive framing of all foods, which would benefit someone who may be recovering from an eating disorder or other health issues, Howard said.

"When I was talking to dietitians, we made it very clear that we don't want to deter students that already struggle from eating," he said. "So that's something that I want to be very mindful of."



UConn Storrs' campus south dining hall serving food to students. South is widely regarded as one of the best dining halls by UConn's students. PHOTO BY NATHAN GALICINAO, GRAB PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

With no prior coding experience, Howard said he used AI to learn how to code and create the app, while taking feedback from others. He said he uploaded almost 60 test builds before he published it for review on the App Store.

"It's [a] nice feeling knowing that I could say that I actually did something beyond just coursework," Howard said. "Right now, it's just a personal project, but I hope that it grows to something more."

He said while he is using UConn as his pilot, he is looking into ways to monetize the app through local advertisements or selling it to local schools. Regardless, he wants to keep it free to all UConn students.

Howard said right now, his main priority is making sure that all UConn students benefit from it.

"I'm going to try to focus it on the individual experience, try to shape it to not just like an average student, but just to absolutely everybody," he said.

CONNECTICUT LEGISLATORS GIVE PRELIMINARY APPROVAL FOR SALE OF AQUARION TO NON-PROFIT ENTITY

by Ayyan Tamjeed
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Last Friday, officials within the Connecticut Public Utilities Regulatory Authority gave a preliminary ruling approving the merger between Eversource-owned Aquarion Water Company and the semi-public South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority.

According to the CT Insider, Eversource Energy executives announced a deal to sell Aquarion to the RWA back in January 2025. This $2.4 billion deal, which includes $1.6 billion in cash and $800 million in debt, would help the parent company pay off its debts and reinvest back into its core natural gas and electricity businesses.

PURA blocked this sale in November last year, citing concerns with its management structure and its ability to meet its "managerial responsibility" to customers, according to the CT Mirror.

This decision was reversed on March 6, after Superior Court Judge Matthew Budzik ordered PURA to reconsider their original decision, according to the CT Mirror.

The recent decision determined that PURA lacks the authority to block the sale, something Judge Budzik said in his written decision, although he did say PURA had authority on one issue: the Aquarion Water Authority's consumer affairs office.

Critics of the Aquarion deal raised concerns about rising water bills, the loss of property taxes and loss of state oversight if this deal goes through.

Under state law, PURA can only approve rates for investor-owned entities, but not for publicly owned entities; If this sale goes through, it will remove PURA's regulatory oversight as Aquarion would operate under a quasi-public entity, the AWA.

The AWA will operate as a sister company alongside the RWA, and both companies will share a board of directors, CEO and CFO.

As part of the application to PURA, Aquarion and RWA officials pledge to not seek a rake hike in the first six months of the merger. After that period, both companies forecasted annual rate increases between 6.5% and 8.35% until 2040 to maintain operations.

Non-profit entities also don't have to pay property taxes. According to Eversource spokeswoman Jamie Ratliff, Aquarion paid $19.4 million in property taxes in 2024. Both companies have agreed to pay no less than that amount through a payment in lieu of taxes agreement.

The RWA was able to bid on Aquarion after Democratic lawmakers pushed through legislation in 2024 that allowed for RWA to create the AWA.

Aquarion Company and its subsidiaries Aquarion Water Company of Connecticut and Torrington Water Company service over 700 thousand people in 62 municipalities across Connecticut, according to a written

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