Opinion

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UConn Dining needs to start caring for students

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UConn has a glaring problem when it comes to dining. It's a universal experience among students to open up their phones to check the dining hall menus and find absolutely nothing they want to eat. Day after day, week after week, students end up going to the Union or spending money downtown just to eat a decent meal. With students required to purchase a meal plan if living on campus, you would think the university would provide food its students want to eat. While the quality of the meals isn't the problem, having poor options has the same effect as having poorly cooked meals.

If even people who have no dietary restrictions experience frustration with the menus, imagine how much worse it is for people who require alternative dining. UConn does offer some alternative dining options, but these choices sometimes feel like more of a formality than actual care. Gluten-free stations are poorly stocked and often cannot constitute an actual meal, leaving students with gluten allergies or sensitivities with subpar meals or seeking dining elsewhere. While some students choose to eat gluten-free, many people do not have the choice due to health constraints, making this an even more pressing issue. Other students who choose alternative diets, such as vegetarians or vegans, also face a lack of options at dining halls. This discourages students from this lifestyle and can even force them to revert to a different diet just to have something to eat. Not providing ample options for these students is a failure on the university's part to meet all students' needs across the board.

While UConn does provide some food options for people with religious dietary constraints (halal or kosher) or time constraints (Grab & Go), the locations, or lack thereof, of these stations can conflict with students' living and learning situations. The only kosher station on campus is located by Towers, which is notoriously far from many classes and low on the list of where students want to reside. For Jewish students following the kosher guidelines, they only have this one inconvenient location to get food they know fits their diet. Some of these students may even be fine arts students who have almost all their classes in a building a 30-minute walk from Towers. To have to live or eat so far from your classes puts these students at a disadvantage with their time.

Other options, such as halal and Grab & Go, have two locations (Towers and South for halal; Towers and Putnam for Grab & Go). But even this can present similar issues to the solitary kosher station. While it may be too expensive to have these stations in every dining hall, it would benefit students to at least have the option on each edge of campus. Students would not face extra pressure having to live in certain areas to eat while losing proximity to their classes. Having a location for each station in South, Putnam and Towers or Northwest would allow students to live anywhere on campus without being concerned about having to trek far for either food or classes. STEM and fine arts majors alike could live near their classes and have their dining needs easily accessible.



Some of the food offerings at South Dining Hall at UConn. The dining halls provide limited options, especially for students with dietary restrictions. PHOTO BY NATHAN GALICINAO, GRAB PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

On their website, UConn Dining Services provides options to reach out about any alternative dining students may need. Having this resource does provide options for people who know they need help and are willing to get it. However, many people won't take the extra step when it comes to eating, especially those who may be struggling with eating disorders. It's much easier to struggle silently than to admit you need assistance, particularly if you do not view your eating habits as harmful. Add on top of that the pressures of college and many students' needs will go unanswered or even unheard. Some may also argue that dining halls have certain options that are offered every day such as salads, grilled cheese and fries, but that isn't enough to sustain someone for months on end. Expecting someone to eat the same foods for almost every meal for an entire semester is ridiculous, not to mention many students may not like these food offerings. Plus, students shouldn't have to rely on the same options just to get a good meal they have been forced to pay for.

All of these issues could be solved if UConn fixed its baseline to provide for what the students want first and foremost. Students shouldn't have to reach out to do something they need to do to survive; the dining halls should provide in the first place. UConn Dining should be asking students what food options they want to see in the dining halls. One way to do this is with a campus-wide survey, which would increase student involvement in food selection. That way they don't have to spend money they don't have on wasteful food options. Students aren't asking for anything insane or expensive to eat. We only want to be able to open the menus and see something good to eat at a dining hall near us. We only ask for the bare minimum of a service we are required to pay for.

COMIC OF THE DAY



COMIC BY ALEXA PAPPAS, STAFF ARTIST