

Project Pulse

SARIS
Student Affairs Research, Information and Systems
University of Massachusetts Amherst

UMass Dining Services (F99-C)

Executive Summary: Almost half of the respondents were on the Value Plan, and another third on the Basic Plan. Students are most likely to frequent the dining commons nearest their residence hall, and 60% of students listed the Bluewall as the other food service operation they frequented most. Students were asked to rate various aspects of the food, cleanliness of the dining facilities, service and atmosphere in dining halls, price and value of meal plans, and communication with Dining Services on a scale where 1 is "poor" and 10 is "excellent." The appearance and friendliness of the employees received the highest mean ratings (7+). The lowest rating (4.98) was given to the value of the meal plan for the price. The mean rating for UMass Dining Services as a whole was 5.61.

On Tuesday, October 5, 1999, Project Pulse conducted a survey designed to assess student satisfaction with University Dining Services. Pulse interviewers attempted to contact 1199 on-campus students who had been randomly selected by computer from the University's database. Interviewers successfully contacted 769 of these students, and 628 (81.7%) agreed to be interviewed. The response rate for the survey was 53.6%, and sampling error is plus or minus approximately five percentage points. The final disposition of the sample is presented in Table 1 and a demographic summary of the respondents may be found in Table 2.

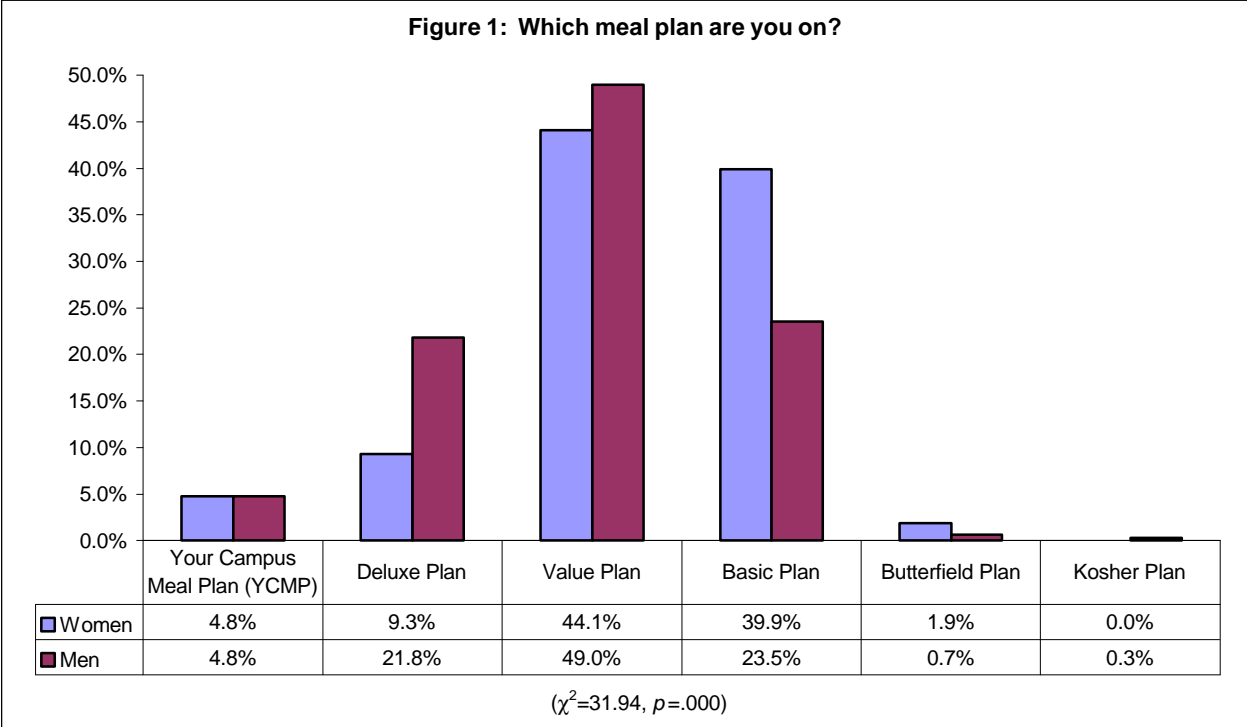
Table 1. Final disposition of the sample.

	N	% of Total	% of Contacted
Response rate (In & cooperated)	628	53.6	81.7
In, declined interview	141	12.0	18.3
Not in	402	34.3	
Totals	*1,171	100.0	100.0

*Excludes 10 sampled students with unobtainable phone numbers.

Table 2. Demographic summary of the respondents

Female	51.4	First-year	50.8
Male	48.6	Sophomore	30.9
		Junior	12.4
		Senior	5.8
		Graduate student	0.2



First, respondents were asked which Dining Service meal plan they are on. Almost half of the 628 students (46.5%, n=284) reported being on the Value Plan, which offers 14 meals per week. Another one-third of the respondents (32.1%, n=196) said they are on the Basic Plan, which includes 10 meals per week. Men were significantly more likely than women to be on the Deluxe Plan which offers unlimited meals. See Figure 1 for a summary of responses to this question. Of the 29 students (4.7%) on Your Campus Meal Plan (YCMP), approximately two-thirds had purchased the Commuter Express plan and most of the remaining third the Economy Plan.

The next set of questions explored which dining halls and food service operations students used most. Worcester dining hall was the most frequented (see Figure 2). Not surprisingly, students tend to use the dining facility nearest to their residence hall. In Franklin, approximately two-thirds of the diners are from Central and one-third are from Orchard Hill. In Worcester, over 40% of the diners are from Sylvan and one-third are from Northeast. In Hampshire and Berkshire, well over 90% of diners reside in Southwest. Next students were asked which of six campus food service operations they used most. As illustrated in Figure 3, three-fifths (59.6%, n=258) of the students said the Bluewall.

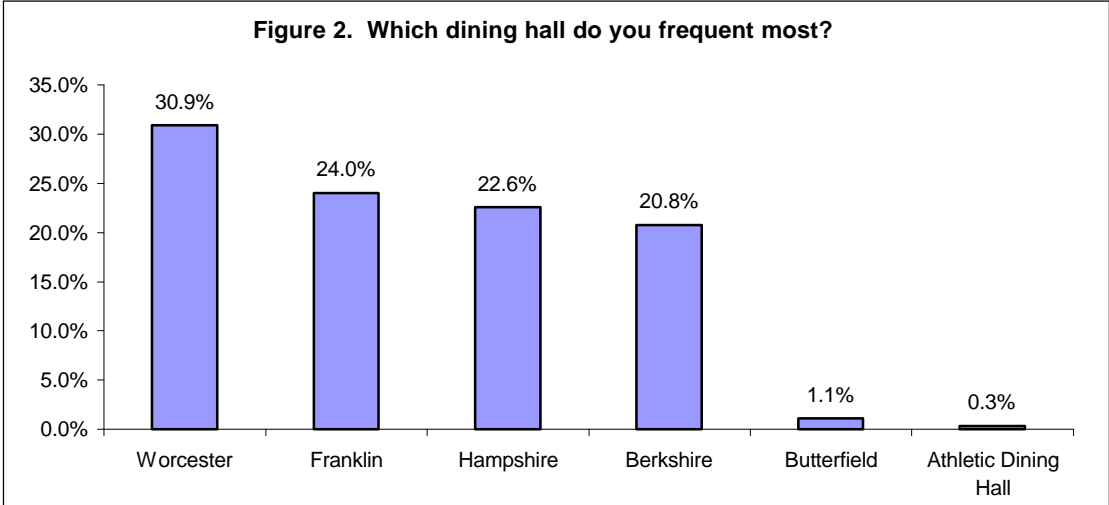
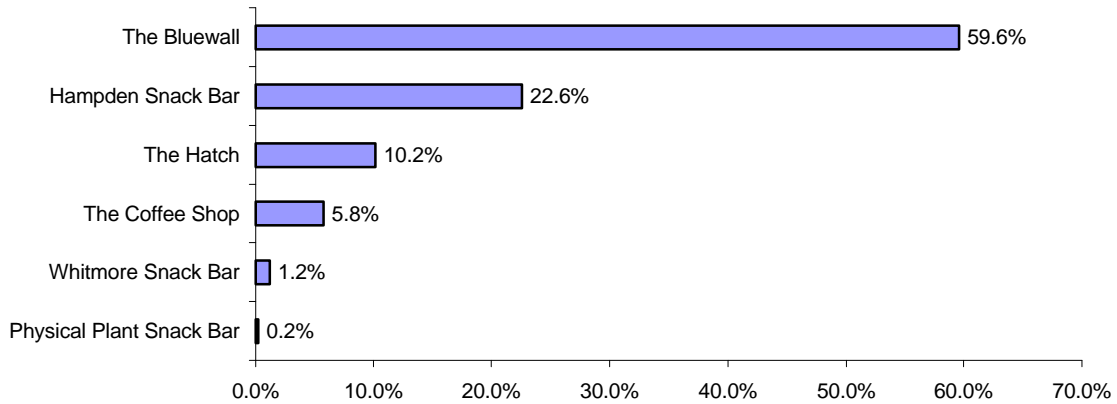


Figure 3. Which food service operation do you frequent most?



Respondents were asked to rate various aspects of Dining Services using a scale ranging from 1 (poor) to 10 (excellent). Figures 4 - 7 display the mean ratings given by students to aspects of the food, cleanliness, service and atmosphere in the dining halls, and to issues of price and communication.

Figure 4. Mean ratings for various aspects of the food in the dining halls

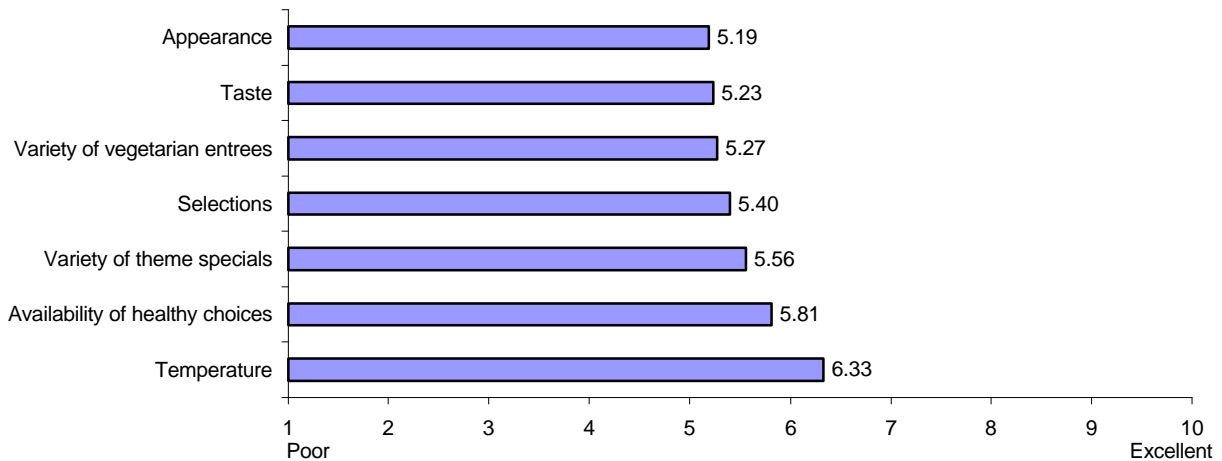


Figure 5. Mean ratings for aspects of cleanliness in the dining halls

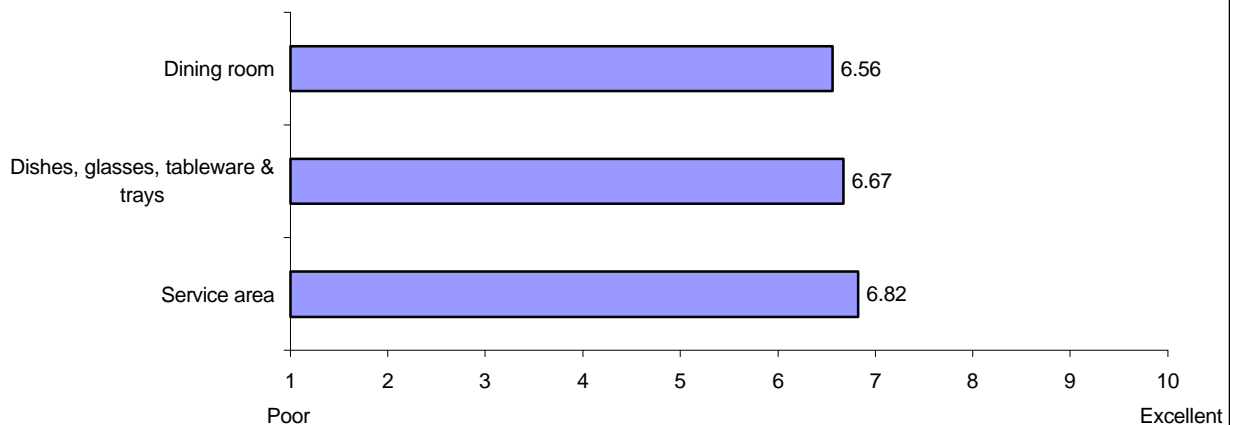


Figure 6. Mean ratings for aspects of service and atmosphere in the dining halls

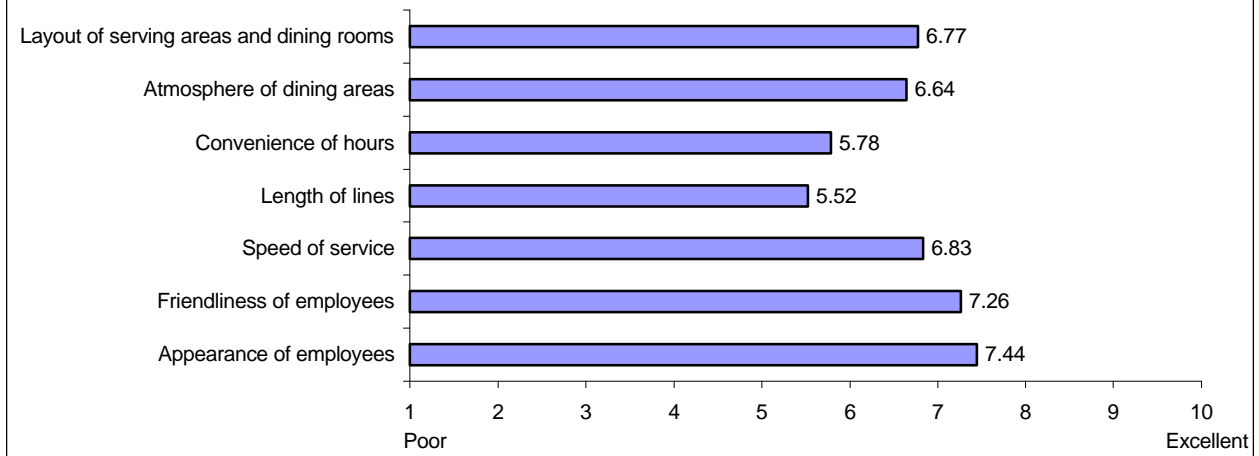
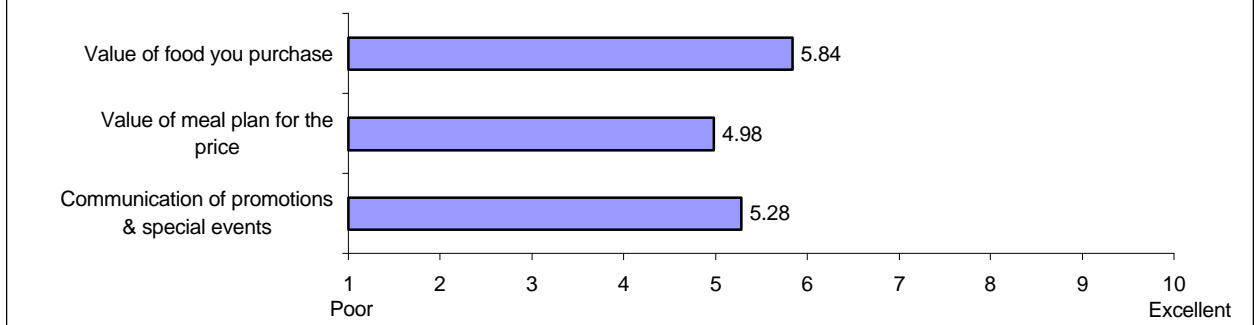
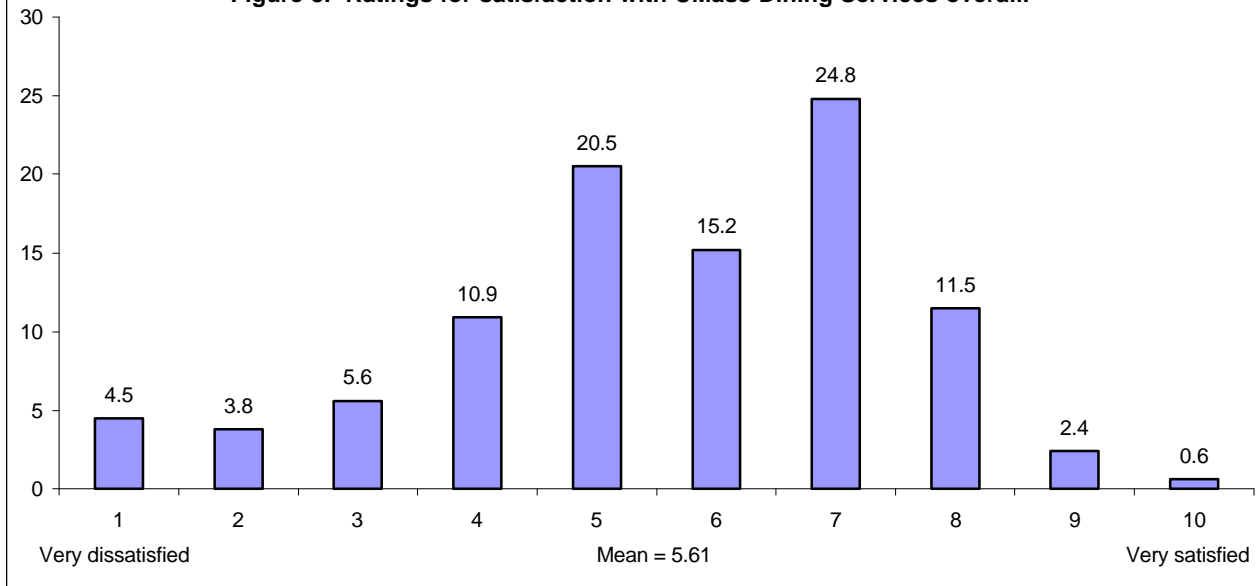


Figure 7. Mean ratings for aspects of price of meals and communication by dining services



Students also were asked to rate UMass Dining Services overall, on a scale ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 10 (very satisfied.) Figure 8 details students responses to this question. The mean rating was 5.61.

Figure 8. Ratings for satisfaction with UMass Dining Services overall.



To further explore issues of communication between dining services and its customers, students were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with two statements. Approximately three-quarters of respondents (74.2%, n=459) agreed that "Dining Services management regularly seeks informal feedback from students" and that "Menu information is posted in convenient locations" (76.0%, n=473). Over half of the respondents (56.9%, n=354) said that they were aware that the hours at Worcester and Berkshire Dining Halls have been extended until 9 PM Monday through Friday. Nearly half (48.6%, n=302) said that they were aware of the Grab N Go concept at the Worcester C-Store and Hampshire Dining Hall.

At the beginning of the semester, Dining Services distributed day planner calendars to all students listing dining hall specials by day. One-quarter (25.8%, n=162) said they do not have the planner, whereas 62.3% (n=287) of those who do said they never use it.

Respondents were asked for suggestions about how Dining Services could serve them better. Most common were suggestions about specific food items to be included or excluded (70 mentions). General statements about the need for "better food" received 67 mentions, requests for "better variety" or "more selection" received 63 mentions, and 56 respondents mentioned the need for longer hours of operation in the dining halls. Other common concerns expressed by students included the need for more healthy and low-fat food choices (29 mentions), and for more and better vegetarian options (20 mentions). Also mentioned were that the food should be served hot and that it should have more flavor or be better cooked (17 mentions each). The cleanliness of the tableware and dining areas was a concern mentioned by 15 students. The need for shorter lines and quicker service were mentioned by 14 respondents. A dozen students requested real plates and silverware rather than plastic and paper implements. Ten mentioned that food was overcooked or undercooked. Smaller numbers of students mentioned various other concerns. On a more positive note, three students commented that the food was "better than last year," two mentioned being happy with the Butterfield plan, and one commented that Hampshire was "good."

[click here to see the item-by-item](#)

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT PROJECT PULSE AT 229 WHITMORE, 545-1390
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