Menus of Change University Research Collaborative Fellowship

Fall 2019
Madelyn Miller
MCURC Fellowship Program

- Menus of Change University Research Collaborative Fellows conduct projects on their campuses and share their findings with other Menus of Change schools
- Provide insights on student needs related to Menus of Change principles
- Expand the reach of the Menus of Change program

My Background

- Government and Politics senior and Master of Public Policy student, minoring in Sustainability Studies
- Former Sustainable Procurement Intern in the Maryland Dept. of General Services
- Dining Services customer for 3+ years
My Project: Favorite Foods in University Dining Halls

If you want to shift menus, it’s important to understand what people already like and dislike. With my project, I hope to create a process to identify what customers really like and dislike on the university’s menus for the purpose of following Menus of Change Principles and meeting the goal of the Cool Food Pledge.

- **Phase One:** Measuring popularity of all dining hall menu items to identify the most and least liked foods
- **Phase Two:** Analyzation of those menu items
- **Phase Three:** Signature items and the future of food on campus — what can we provide that community members will crave?
  - Synthesis findings for university dining halls and share with other MCURC Fellows
Over the course of the semester, food items in line with Menus of Change Principles and the Cool Food Pledge goal were sampled by the Global STEWARDS group. Graduate students were asked to respond to a survey, rating the food and giving feedback on taste, presentation, and how they would change the meal to make it more climate-friendly.
Big Takeaways from Trialing Menu Items with STEWARDS

- Average meal rating went up throughout the semester
- More “adventurous” items were rewarded in the qualitative feedback
- Dining Services was responsive to the student feedback throughout the semester
- Students rated the meals as a 6 or higher (out of 7) during six of the nine weeks
- Changing the norm was welcomed

Samosa Chaat
“YUMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM!!!!”

Red Bean and Cheese Pupusas
“Great flavor. Fresh veggies with a good mix of textures.”

Asian Noodle Salad with Fried Tofu
“I love the noodle "bar" concept.”
Supplemental Slides on Global STEWARDS Survey
Survey Form to Collect Feedback

Students were asked to rate the meal served to them each day in a form shared with them in early October. Not all forms were submitted with written comments. To explain why the Global STEWARDS’ opinions were important to Dining Services, the MCURC Fellow gave a brief presentation about the Cool Food Pledge during the third week.

The feedback was checked throughout the semester to make sure that responses were being recorded, and so that Dining Services could be responsive to some requests (e.g. stocking the room with utensils, rather than delivering more each time with the meal and volume of food delivered).

The MCURC Fellow downloaded the results from the surveys after Week 9 and used the dates the surveys were submitted to match the feedback to the correct week.

The survey can be found at go.umd.edu/GSfeedback.
Summary of Responses

The highest number of students submitted feedback in the first week, but 4-6 responses for each week were typical. This presentation the MCURC Fellow gave in Week 3 may have had an effect on response rate. There is a positive trend in average meal rating suggesting that Dining Services was able to provide meals the STEWARDS enjoyed, and that Dining Services was responsive to the feedback. Students rated their meal as a 4 or higher every week except Week 5, where one student rated the meal with a 1 and another a 2. Six of the weeks had average meal ratings which were 6 or higher.
Week 1 feedback: Lunch was great! I think everyone enjoyed it, but we did have a lot of leftovers. There were 13 of us and half of both subs were uneaten. The students took the leftovers but we would have been okay with just the meat sub and a few veggie wraps for the vegetarians in the group. There definitely was a lot of plastic wrap waste as well! One additional piece of feedback I got was that we are all ready to try the new menu items if they are ready! Everyone is ready to try the new Menus for Change dishes, so please send those to us if you guys are ready to roll them out.

I exclusive ate the meat sandwiches that day. It might have been helpful to provide a ‘Lettuce wrap’ option to reduce the enormity of the sandwich. It was super delicious!

Please don’t add different kinds of meat together

1.) Use less plastic wrap (2.) less meat on sandwiches (3.) less food to prevent waste, there was a lot leftover

The serving size was large and had lot of meat.

Bread was too thick.

Include more fruits and non-preserved food
All Wrapped Up
An assortment of colorful tortillas (spinach, sundried tomato, wheat, and plain) with turkey, ham, roast beef, grilled vegetables, and Italian cold cuts with romaine lettuce

Average rating (1-7): 6

- Whole wheat sub rolls would be preferred. For the veggie sub, I happen to not be a fan of squash so other veggies would have been preferred (peppers, cucumbers, avocado...but I'm not sure if avocados have a low production footprint?) Overall, menus could become more sustainable by adding the pulses to meal options. Check out: https://pulses.org/world-pulses-day-2019
- Today's meal was arguably my favorite! The veggie sandwich wraps had the right amount the spice and flavor. So much so, that I completely didn't notice that bits of squash was in it! I don't care much for squash. Also the cheese and tomato/goat cheese sandwiches were superb!
Week 3: Sandwich Platter with Grilled Portobello Mushroom, Spicy Mexican Vegetable, Cheese Roasted Red Pepper (Goodies to Go)

Average rating (1-7): 5.5

- Mushroom sandwich: Very Good overall, these will do well for catering but I would not buy this at a restaurant. I thought the bread was a bit voluminous and hard. And I liked the cheese spread on the inside. Cucumber wrap: Needs more seasoning but refreshing.
  Cheese Sandwich: My favorite so far. But the pepper isn't doing much to enhance the sandwich, maybe sun-dried tomatoes or something to give a kick of flavor.

- Using less plastic wrap. It has reduced significantly from the first order, thanks! Perhaps you can give us a stockpile of plates, napkins and associated cutlery so you don't have to wrap up a new set with plastic wrap every week. We appreciate the compostable plates! Is it possible to pack the lunches in compostable containers as well rather than plastic? We liked the fruit rather than the cookies.

- I would recommend the plain bread without any nuts added in it and more fruit choices in the meal

- The veggie wrap had great flavor. I liked that it was a little spicy.

- Have more diverse fruits and veggies

Vegetarian Choices

- Grilled Portobello Mushroom with roasted red peppers, baby spinach, and boursin cheese
- Spicy Mexican Vegetable with refried beans, roasted zucchini and yellow squash, avocado, lettuce, and tomato
- Two Cheese Roasted Red Pepper with boursin and provolone
Week 4: Asian Noodle Salad with Fried Tofu (Green Tidings)

Average rating (1-7): 6.5

- Fantastic! The tofu was absolutely delicious. I love the noodle "bar" concept. My only comment is that the volume of food was probably twice as much as we needed for our group.
- excellent choice of meal, loved the tofu, the noodles were under seasoned
- Overall, this was a delicious meal. However, independently, the items could use some improvement. The pasta's pesto sauce is a good thought but it needs more flavor (salt, garlic, etc.). I don't mind that it was so oily, in fact, that one of the reasons making it so yummy, but it was very oily. I really liked the tofu, it was executed very well both in taste and texture. Veggies were good choices. The peas and sprouts were particularly delicious.
- This week's meal was great! Everyone's really enjoyed the "build your own pasta meal bar" format. All the veggies were fresh, crisp and colorful. The tofu was delicious. We had a lot of leftovers, Goodies to Go may need to cut back on the portions. Still a lot of unnecessary plastic wrapping.
Week 5: Terrapin Falafel* with Chips (Green Tidings)

Average rating (1-7): 3.83

*Falafel was not delivered

- The "make your own pita" was great. The feta and olives and other toppings were very tasty. A protein option such as fried tofu would have been appreciated, or maybe some beans. Bagged chips were a nice touch.
- Some protein, like chickpeas would've been nice.
- More hearty food! I eat and am hungry again an hour later.
- More choices for fillings could make the meal more attractive
- More source and fruits.
- Something more substantial to go inside the pita would be nice, like falafel.
Week 6: Middle Eastern Vegan Wrap with roasted cauliflower,
sweet potato, and a tahini vinaigrette (Good Tidings)

Average rating (1-7): 6.17

- Very tasty! Some kind of condiments or spread inside the sandwich may be an added bonus. The cookies were VERY tasty.
- loved the cauliflower, more cauliflower is recommended
- The sweet potato/cauliflower/spinach rolls were fantastic! Delicious! And the cookies were great too!
- The cauliflower was great.
- The wrap was great! very delicious. I would eat that every day.
Excellent job with the pupusas! I was trying really hard to note major differences with my beloved traditional pupusas. But the taste and quality were impressively on par. Bravo!

The food was excellent. Great flavor. Fresh veggies with a good mix of textures.

This was great. As long as you include a plant protein source I'm okay.

The meal was excellent.
Week 8: Fettuccine with Eggplant Bolognese (Green Tidings)

Average rating (1-7): 6.2

- Meal was great ... we have enough plates, napkins and cutlery stockpiled, we have stopped receiving utensils for distributing/sharing the food. Please send us tongs, large spoons, etc as necessary for the meal next week.
- more vegetables in the sauce please
- Less carbohydrate would be great
- I enjoyed the chunks of veggies in the pasta sauce and the peppers and onions to go with it.
Week 9: Samosa Chaat (Green Tidings)

Average rating (1-7): 6.8

- YUMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM!!!!
- less meat
- Pretty good today.
- The toppings were very fresh and flavorful.
- Food was good

Image from @umdgreentidings on Instagram