

Yale College Council Task Force on Dining



Fall 2015

Authored by:
Kevin Sullivan, Leader
Abigayle Troy, Member
Michaela Cloutier, Member
Daniel Hamidi, Member
Jorge Lema, Member
Arabelle Schoenberg, Member

Table of Contents

- I. Introduction
- II. Dining Hall Hours
- III. Meal Plan Expansion
- IV. Sustainability and Educational Programs
- V. Clarity and Communications
- VI. Conclusion
- VII. Acknowledgements
- VIII. Appendix

I. Introduction

Yale Dining is an incredibly impressive institution. According to its website, Dining's 23 dining facilities and retail operations serve 14,000 meals daily, with each one meant to "nourish the well-being of those dining at Yale and [...] support the world class standing of Yale University." Dining demonstrates a sincere commitment to quality service and constant enhancement to make the service the best it can be. It is in the spirit of such a commitment that this report seeks to provide student-sourced feedback on several crucial points of the Yale Dining experience.

Within this report are the findings of the Yale College Council's Dining Task Force, a six-member team created to examine potential avenues of improvement for a service integral to university life. Using information gathered from the YCC's annual Fall Survey, a focus group with the members of YCC, and peer institution research, the Task Force has put together a variety of recommendations for Yale Dining to consider as it continues its commitment to provide the best quality service to the community.

The policy recommendations focus on four areas: dining hall hours, meal plans, sustainability and educational initiatives, and clarity and communication. Each area of focus constitutes an individual section within the report and features a brief overview, in-depth research, and several concluding suggestions. In the first section, we have found that dining hall facilities at comparable institutions are open longer and later, or are compensated by expanded late-night options supplied by university dining. Similarly, most peer institutions offer a wider array of meal plans, while Yale seems to lack this diversity of options and costs. In terms of sustainability and educational initiatives, we have found that Yale has already been successful in establishing pertinent programs; our recommendations highlight potential ways to make these programs even more effective. Finally, we have explored various points of confusion and methods Dining can take to rectify them, with a particular emphasis on online communications and accessibility to student feedback. These suggestions seek to further improve the relationship between Yale Dining and the student population at large.

II. Dining Hall Hours

Dining halls are the centerpiece of the Yale Dining experience; they provide a gathering spot for students of all residential colleges to converse, exchange ideas, and enjoy the food provided. Few students like to skip having a meal in a dining hall, though the Task Force’s research has shown that a significant portion of the student population must do so at some point - for some, even on a regular basis. In this section, we have investigated the hours of operation for various peer institutions and gauged student opinion on the current hours at Yale.

Dining Hours at Peer Institutions

In the table below, we have displayed the dining options for both Harvard University and Princeton University students, which both have a college or house system similar to Yale’s.

	Breakfast	Lunch	Brunch	Dinner	Other
 <p>Harvard</p>	<i>Sun – Sat:</i> All dining halls: 7:30AM – 10AM	<i>Mon – Sat:</i> Ten dining halls: 12PM – 2:15PM Two dining halls: 12PM – 2:30PM Annenberg: <i>first year dining hall</i> 11:30AM–2:15PM	<i>Sun:</i> All dining halls: 11:30AM – 2:15PM	<i>Sun – Sat:</i> Ten dining halls: 5PM – 7:15PM One dining hall: 5PM – 7:30PM One dining hall: 5PM – 8PM Annenberg: 4:30PM – 7:15PM	<i>Sun – Thu:</i> “Brain Breaks” <i>late night self-serve snacks</i> House dining halls: <i>dining hall and hours varies</i> starting sometime between 8:35PM – 10PM, lasting until late night Annenberg: 9:15PM – 10:45PM
		<i>Mon – Fri:</i> Fly-By: <i>pick up lunch service</i> 11:15AM–2:15PM			
	 <p>Princeton</p>	<i>Mon – Fri:</i> Residential colleges: 7:30AM – 11AM	<i>Mon – Fri:</i> Residential colleges: 11:30AM – 2PM	<i>Sat – Sun :</i> Residential colleges: 10AM – 2PM	<i>Sun – Sat:</i> Residential colleges: 5PM – 8PM

Of the information detailed below, the *Other* category explains options that students are given outside of usual dining hall hours. Of particular note are each institution’s options for late-night dining: Harvard offers dining-sponsored “Brain Breaks” in each house’s dining hall, while all of Princeton’s retail operations are open until midnight.

At other Ivy League institutions, greater emphasis is placed on retail and cafe spaces. Many of these are open for the entire day and well into the evening. For example, Columbia University’s dining halls do not close between meals. Students may eat at any time between 8AM and 2AM Monday through Thursday and between 8AM and 9PM on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Similarly, Cornell University and the University of Pennsylvania offer dining options at every hour from 7AM to 2AM each day, though Penn closes its locations at 7:30PM on Saturday and Sunday.

Brown University is somewhat unique, as it offers a number of retail options as well as dining halls with continuous hours. On Mondays through Saturdays, students have dining options at every hour between 7:30AM to 2AM. This includes Sharpe Refectory, a dining hall that is open continuously from 7:30AM to 7:30PM on Mondays and Saturdays, and from 10:30AM to 7:30PM on Sundays.

Current Dining Hours at Yale

The current hours for most undergraduate dining locations at Yale are listed in the table below. Yale Dining’s late-night options include Durfee’s, open until 1 AM, and Thain Café in Bass Library, open until 11 PM most nights. These locations require independent purchases outside of lunch swipes, though students may redeem any dining points they have as well.

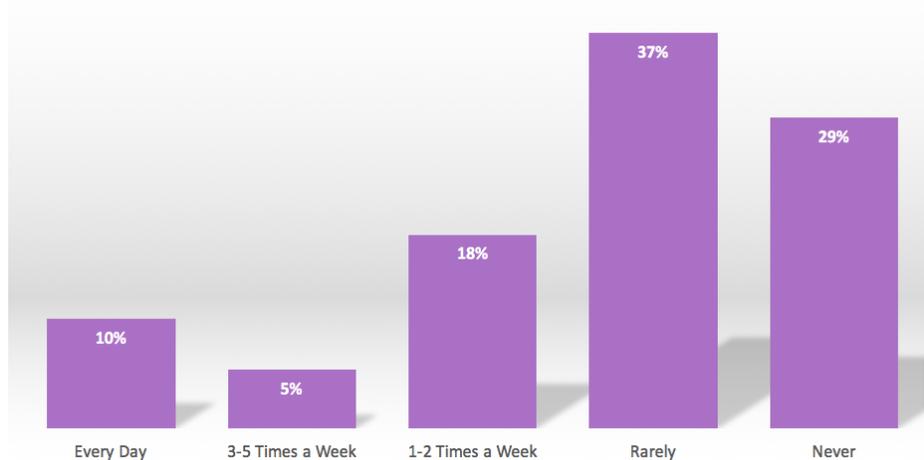
Breakfast	Lunch	Brunch	Dinner	Other
<i>Mon – Fri:</i>	<i>Mon – Fri:</i>	<i>Sat – Sun:</i>	<i>Mon –Thu:</i>	<i>Late Night Options:</i>
All Colleges & Slifka: 8 AM – 11 AM	All Colleges & Slifka: 11:30 AM – 1:30 PM	All Colleges: 11:30 AM – 1:30 PM	Ten Colleges & Slifka: 5 PM – 7:30 PM ESM & HGS: 5 PM – 8 PM	Durfee’s: 10 AM – 1 AM (Mon – Fri) 12 PM – 1 AM (Sat – Sun)
Bran-Say, ESM, Silliman: <i>Hot Breakfast</i> 7:30 AM – 10:30 AM	Commons: 11:30 AM – 3 PM HGS: 11:30 AM – 2 PM	Slifka: <i>Lunch (Sat)</i> 12:30 PM <i>Brunch (Sun)</i> 11 AM – 1 PM	<i>Fri:</i>	Thain Café: 10 AM – 11 PM (Mon – Thu) 12 PM – 11 PM (Sun)
<i>Sat – Sun:</i>			All Colleges: 5 PM – 7PM HGS: 5PM – 8PM Slifka: 7PM	
Morse, Calhoun: 8 AM – 10:30 AM			<i>Sat – Sun:</i> All Colleges: 5 PM – 7PM Slifka: 5 PM – 7:30 PM (Sun)	

We have excluded residential college butteries from this table, as they are not directly affiliated with Yale Dining; as such, points cannot be redeemed at these locations. Furthermore, butteries tend not to offer many healthy options, whereas Dining places an emphasis on high-quality and nutritious products in its retail locations.

Student Input and Opinion

In the YCC Fall 2015 survey, Yale students were asked, “How often do you skip a meal in the dining hall due to a tight schedule?” Of the 1319 respondents, 71% answered that they have missed meals at some point due to their schedule; 32% percent state that this happens on a daily or weekly basis. The reasons for missing meals are varied. To supplement the survey, the Task Force also conducted a focus group about 40 members of the YCC. When asked why they might skip a meal, participants reported that they have too many classes during lunch hours; One participant in the focus group noted, “All of last year, I missed every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday lunch because I had back to back to back classes.” Missing meals often comes at a great loss to students as one respondent fittingly noted, “People feel like they are losing their money if they aren’t using every swipe.”

Frequency of Skipped Meals



The survey went on to ask, “If certain dining halls were open for extended dinner hours, what would your ideal closing time be?” Of the 1306 respondents, the overwhelming majority wished to see an extension to at least 8 PM in locations beyond Morse, Ezra Stiles, and HGS, save for a handful of respondents who noted they were satisfied with the current hours in the “Other” section. Furthermore, 66% stated they would like certain dining halls to be open until at least 9 PM and 25% until at least 9:30

PM. The results show a significant demand for extending dinner hours beyond the current time-frame; this may also indicate an interest in late-night options within dining halls themselves, akin to Harvard's service.



Conclusions and Recommendations

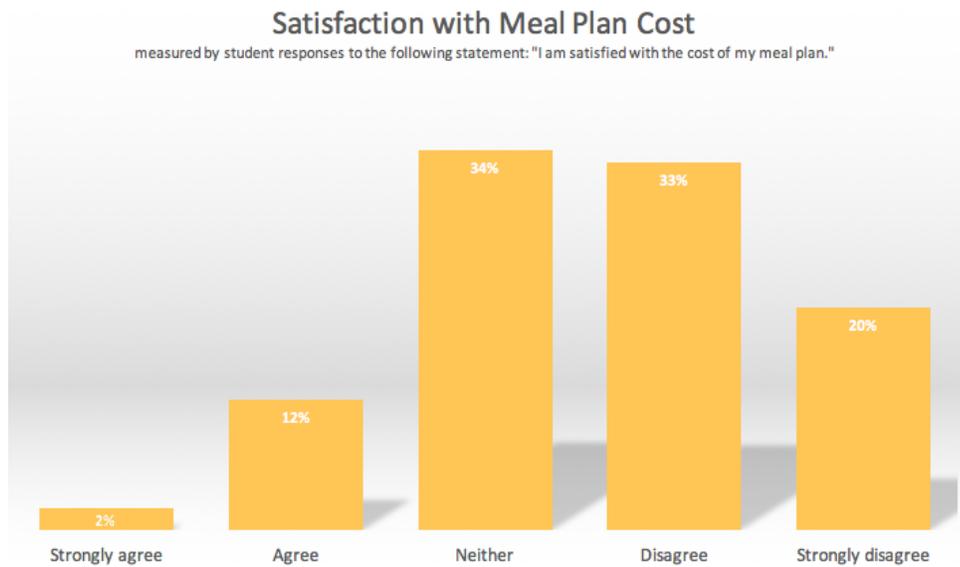
1. Breakfast hours are reasonable and no significant demand exists for their expansion. However, a minority of students indicated that they often skip breakfast due to early classes.
2. Dining should consider a slight increase to lunch and brunch hours. Numerous dining halls at Princeton and Harvard are open for longer than at Yale, where later lunch hours exist only at HGS and Commons. Furthermore, many students have expressed concern with getting to lunch in dining halls on time due to their class schedules. Though Commons and retail swipes address the issue to some extent, student input indicates that they would prefer eating in a residential college dining hall. We believe it would be useful to extend the hours of certain dining halls by 30 minutes until 2 PM, much like HGS.
3. Dining should consider an increase to its dinner hours. On average, Yale residential college dinner hours are over 30 minutes shorter than Princeton's dinner hours. In addition, Harvard houses offer longer dinner hours on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday than do Yale residential colleges. Given that Yale offers few late night dining options, unlike Harvard, Princeton, Columbia, Brown, Cornell, and Penn, its current

dinner hours severely restrict students with irregular schedules; students with evening sections, labs, and extracurricular or athletic commitments often struggle to find accessible on campus meal options. The survey demonstrates the high demand for such a change, with many students hoping to expand even beyond the 8 PM limit of Ezra Stiles, Morse, and HGS.

4. If increasing dinner hours proves impractical or inefficient, Dining should consider other outlets for late night dining, similar to Harvard's "Brain Breaks." We find that Durfee's, Thain Café, and college butteries are not sufficient in this matter. The first two pose an inconvenience to students who live farther away from the center of campus, while butteries tend to have unhealthy options, frequently run out of supplies needed for their offerings, and are not affiliated with Dining. With the Schwarzman Center project well underway, it would be worthwhile to explore the possibility of 24-hour options.

III. Meal Plan Expansion

In the Fall 2015 Survey, the YCC asked students to state the extent of their agreement with the following statement: I am satisfied with the cost of my meal plan. Of the 1,320 respondents, 53% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement and only 14% agreed or strongly agreed. This large degree of dissatisfaction prompted the Task Force to investigate the current meal plans at Yale. In the section that follows, we have compared Yale’s costs to those of peer institutions and have identified points of confusion over the provisions of certain plans.



Current Meal Plans at Yale

The current system of undergraduate meal plan offers four options, although the ‘Off-Campus’ plan is available only to those who live off campus. Of the three plans available to the majority of students, there is at most a \$75 variance among them, primarily because the ‘Anytime’ plan offers just \$70 worth of points to differentiate it from the ‘Full’ plan. As we will explore in the next few sections, some students have raised concerns as to how the equivalencies are calculated for each plan. If points approximately follow a 1-to-1 ratio with dollars - as implied by the difference between the ‘Anytime’ and ‘Full’ plans - then it is unclear why the ‘Full’ and ‘Any-14’ plans are the exact same cost.

Plan	Cost/Semester	Meals/Week	Points/Semester	Guest/Block Swipes
Anytime	\$3,275	Unlimited	\$70	5
Full	\$3,200	21	-	5
Any-14	\$3,200	14	\$150	5
Off-Campus	\$1,100	5	\$125	30

Plans at Peer Institutions

In the table below, we have compared the cost and provisions of Yale's "Any-14" meal plan to similar plans at other Ivy League universities. These plans are the closest to the 'Any-14' plan each institution offers, though it should be noted that Harvard Dining only offers one plan to its students with unlimited swipes. The "Any-14" plan at Yale is by far the most expensive out of the 12-14 swipe plans and offers the second smallest compensation in Dining points or dollars.

School	Cost/Semester	Meals/Week	Points or Dollars	Guest Swipes	Location Count
Brown	\$2,225	14	\$150/year	4/year	12
Columbia	\$2,111	12	\$200	6	11
Cornell	\$2,758	14	\$400	4	29
Dartmouth	\$1,805	14	\$200	-	7
Harvard	\$2,996	Unlimited	\$60	-	26
Penn	\$2,494	12	\$212.50	-	11
Princeton	\$2,865	13	-	10	16
Yale	\$3,200	14	\$150	5	23

Yale runs one of the largest dining operations on the list, with 23 facilities, 14 of which are full-service dining halls. The scope of Yale Dining is rivaled only by Harvard, which maintains 13 dining halls. Although Cornell has more facilities overall, the vast majority are smaller cafes or retail locations. Yale is also unique in that students are allowed to eat in any dining hall. At Harvard, students are restricted to their individual houses, or Annenberg Hall for freshmen.

The Task Force will refrain from suggesting an overall reduction in the cost of each meal plan. When we consider the overall scope of Yale Dining - the number of dining halls and retail operations, the quality of the food, the staff it employs - it would be impractical to impose meaningful reductions to the plans without creating a need for cuts or limitations. However, as many students remain dissatisfied with the current plans, we believe that a reexamination of the provisions as well as the addition of less expensive options might aid in assuaging these concerns.

Confusion over Provisions

While conducting our focus group, we found that many participants were confused by the meal plan information provided by Yale Dining's website.

Perhaps the most confounding point is the difference – or lack of difference – in cost between the default ‘Full’ plan and the ‘Any-14’ plan. Both plans come at a cost of \$3,200 per semester, yet those on the ‘Any-14’ plan receive 7 fewer meals per week and only \$150 compensation in Dining Points. This lack of equivalency confuses many. One participant in our focus group noted that they would prefer the ‘Any-14’ plan because they do not eat three meals each day, yet find the \$150 compensation “grossly inadequate.” Another participant posed the question, “Why can’t there be a cheaper 14 meal plan with no [Dining] points?” To these students, it seems impractical to have a plan with 1/3 fewer swipes and \$150 in points for the exact same price. Furthermore, peer institutions provide significantly more compensation in dining credits to students who opt for plans with less meal swipes. A system like this is certainly within reach at Yale as well.

Confusion also exists regarding the differences between the ‘Anytime’ meal plan and the ‘Full’ plan. According to the Yale Dining website, the former allows for unlimited swipes and \$70 in points, while the latter provides 21 swipes each week. However, the meaning of “unlimited” is confusing: Dining appears to have a continuous swipe policy for all meal plans, allowing students to transfer from dining hall to dining hall as many times as they wish during any meal period. This is inconsistent with the Dining website, which mentions a “double-swipe policy” that is only useable during lunch hours and appears to count against one’s weekly swipe count for those on finite meal plans. This inconsistency drew confusion from one holder of the ‘Anytime’ plan, who “thought that [the additional cost of the plan] was for getting unlimited swipes.” The understanding of the Task Force is that the website is incorrect, and students are allowed to transfer or “double swipe” regardless of meal plan or time of day. If this is the case, then the differences between the ‘Anytime’ and ‘Full’ meal plans are negligible, beyond the additional Dining points one is receiving, which incidentally do not match the \$75 increase in cost.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the comment of another participant, an off-campus resident who found the ‘Off-Campus’ plan “great and convenient.” They furthermore continued to suggest that the plan be offered to the student body at large, or at least a comparable plan that trades fewer weekly swipes with a larger number of points and guest (or block) swipes.

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. We recommend that Yale Dining assemble a focus group composed of Dining administrators and students who are on a variety of meal plans to explore ways

to improve the meal plans system in a manner that is cost effective and substantive for students. Additionally, the current system should be clarified on the Dining website, particularly with regard to the confusion over the double/continuous swipe policy.

2. Dining should consider restructuring the 'Any-14' plan with a greater number of points to compensate for the large reduction in swipes. Alternatively, the plan's cost should be brought down to match the current provisions of 14 swipes and \$150 in points.
3. The 'Off-Campus' plan should be available to on-campus students who might enjoy the reduced cost and the greater meal flexibility. If the plan itself cannot be opened to the wider Yale community, we recommend that Dining develop a comparable plan for on-campus students who would like fewer swipes, greater flexibility, and reduced costs.

IV. Sustainability and Educational Programs

The Task Force has found that Yale Dining already does quite a lot to ensure its food is sustainable and that students are well-informed on what they eat. Sustainability is a particular high-note for Dining, with new initiatives founded each year to improve its commitment to bringing fresh, healthy ingredients to the dining halls across campus.

Sustainability Programs

Current Achievements and Comparisons

Yale Dining is unique when it comes to sustainable programming. It takes a 4-pronged approach to the term: sustainable food is local, humanely raised, eco-sensitive, and fairly traded. According to the Dining website, over 37% of purchases are sustainable in this regard. Furthermore, Yale Dining's partnership with the distributor *FreshPoint* has greatly improved its ability to source sustainable and fresh ingredients.

Comparable institutions report a variety of figures for sustainable sourcing, though few define the term on their sites as thoroughly as Yale does. Harvard Dining reports that 32% of its food budget is spent on local goods, though it does not mention any further prerequisites for its definition of sustainability. Columbia Dining sources 52% of its food from vendors within a 250-mile radius of campus, though the vendors mentioned can potentially receive their food from points further beyond this limit. Princeton is a standout: it sources 46% of its food from local, sustainable sources, and has won silver recognition from the National Association of College and University Food Services for its procurement practices. This is within reach for Yale through the continuation of its commitment to sustainable purchasing.

Beyond sustainable sourcing, Yale Dining has long participated in the growing trend of recycling used cooking oil for biofuels. [As early as 2005](#), Dining has been donating its waste cooking fuels to local biodiesel production companies; Yale's own shuttle service runs using the biofuels produced by these businesses. Columbia began a [similar program](#) in 2007, with Princeton following suit [in 2009](#). In this regard, Yale Dining has been ahead of the curve, acting on sustainability trends well before peer institutions.

Future Outlets

Harvard, Brown, and Cornell all host farmers' markets on campus for extended periods of time that allow students to buy sustainable products. Yale Dining has begun a similar

initiative, though the “UnCommon Market, outside of the Schwarzman Center in Beinecke Plaza. This market, however, does not convene during the school year. A full-fledged, consistent farmer’s market would allow students even greater access to healthy and fresh foods, and potentially combat the so-called “Yale bubble” by inviting in local vendors, food carts, and New Haven residents. With time and proper advertising, an expanded farmers’ market could become a staple event in the lives of Yale students.

On a different note, efforts at waste reduction and management can be improved beyond the current emphasis on composting. Nearly all of Yale’s food and disposable plates and utensils are composted, which has eradicated a significant portion of “waste” in the form of trash disposal. However, the configuration of waste receptacles in some dining halls creates confusion as to what should be discarded in each bin. Though dining halls usually have bins for composting, recycling, and trash, many plate clearing stations only have compost bins; thus, students occasionally place non-compostable materials in the bins, contaminating it with materials that won’t degrade properly. In other locations, food scraps can end up in trash bins, which makes any zero-waste initiatives difficult to realize. As such, clear, organized waste management is necessary in all dining halls to prevent these scenarios of improper disposal and contamination.

Educational Opportunities

A proper education on Yale Dining’s services is essential for students to maximize their dining experience at the university. Yale students must be conscious of nutrition, physical fitness, allergen precautions, and stress eating in order to maintain their health and reach their full potential. While Yale Dining has made a concerted effort to keep students well-informed of the food they’re eating, several peer institutions have implemented in-depth programs with resources that serve to promote health, wellness, and nutritional education.

On-Campus Dietitians

Princeton, Columbia, The University of Pennsylvania, Brown, and Cornell have staffed registered dietitians and nutritionists to serve as resources for their students. Princeton students with food allergies and special diets are able to contact the dietitian first, who then arranges to meet the chef in charge of their residential college dining hall to discuss the available resources. Columbia’s registered dietitian and Executive Chef

lead dining unit tours to aid students in locating healthy and allergen-free items. At Cornell, the registered dietitian trains staff on food allergies and works individually with students, parents, faculty, and staff members who have special dietary requirements or are interested in learning on how to make healthier dining choices. As a result, staff training exists as a continuous process, as workers may approach a professional at anytime with specific case concerns.

In a similar vein, the Yale Dining website allows for students with special dietary needs to register online and offers the opportunity to arrange accommodations within their dining hall. However, this program seems to include only those with certain “medical conditions, food allergies and sensitivities, and family medical histories,” and excludes students who may simply wish to explore ways to eat healthier and maximize their dining experience.

Expanding this commitment to include a universally-accessible registered dietitian could accommodate all students who wish to better their health and overall enjoyment of the Yale Dining experience. Ideally, the dietitian would work within Dining’s administration to review daily meals with interested students and staff, hold educational sessions for those who wish to eat healthier, and assist students with dietary restrictions on where and what to eat on a given day. This would give all Yale students the opportunity to meet with someone expressly meant to help improve their choices in the dining hall and promote a healthier student body through events and activities.

Programs at Peer Institutions

Columbia Dining runs an information program through their registered dietitian, creating posters for dining halls and sending a newsletter to students with an emphasis on healthy choices in the dining hall. Like Yale, it annually celebrates “Food Day,” though it goes on to celebrate National Nutrition Month in March as well through information campaigns and events. Meanwhile, the University of Pennsylvania was the first Ivy League institution to endorse the Healthier Campus Initiative, the collegiate branch of the nationwide *Let’s Move* initiative; this involves well-publicized goals to create healthier menus with high nutritional standards and furthermore encourages students to be active outside the dining halls as well. Though not explicitly run through Cornell Dining, the Cornell Healthy Eating Program functions as a counseling service for those who struggle to find healthy or safe options in the dining halls. Cornell also runs a Student Assembly Dining Committee, similar to the underutilized Dining Student Advisory Committee that exists at Yale.

Harvard Dining's Food Literacy Fellowship Program is a rather unique program; it hires undergraduates to learn about food systems, leadership, and event design. Though focusing on five areas of food and society: agriculture, sustainability, nutrition, preparation, and community, fellows plan projects and events that help educate and engage the Harvard community and connect food-related initiatives and projects across the university. They serve as a 24-hour resource on food education in each of their respective houses. Fellows also participate in weekly meetings, a one-day retreat, events, field trips, one event per month on a food education topic of their choosing, and dining hall education campaigns. Not only does this fellowship program provide the Harvard community with food education, but also provides networking opportunities, volunteer and hands on experience with local food organizations and businesses, experience in event planning, budgeting and marketing, and, most importantly, a community of individuals who share a common interest.

Maximizing Awareness and Recommendations

In recent years, Dining has done well in improving the overall awareness of nutrition and healthy eating. From a comprehensive reform of salad bars in 2009 to the provision of nutrition labels for all items to the recent "More This, Less That" campaign, Yale Dining demonstrates its commitment to healthy eating. Direct student engagement is crucial in ensuring that these initiatives resonate with students. Dining has already begun to engage directly with students in conjunction with the YCC through annual farm tours, though we would like to emphasize that events like these inherently cannot reach all students due to limited space. Broader initiatives are equally as necessary to disseminate information about healthy eating.

Yale Dining seeks to ensure that students are well-fed and well-informed; for instance, nutrition facts are provided for nearly all foods at dining halls, on the Yale Dining website, and on the Yale Dining app. Dining Hall staff members undergo training on cross-contamination, allergen precautions, sustainability, and more. In 2010 alone, 40% of all purchases were sustainable in the following categories: local, eco-sensitive, humane, fair, natural (no rBsTs), responsibly farmed, hormone free, and cage-free. All beef is grass fed, grass finished, antibiotic free, or halal. Ninety-eight percent of all pre- and post-consumed food waste is composted. Yale Dining truly seeks to offer food that is both healthy and tasty in an attempt to nourish a culture in which cooking, eating, and food preparation are interwoven; food, amongst so many other things, brings Yalies together and Dining is savvy to this principle. However, many of these facts and commitments appear to only be available only in a rather small section of the Dining

website; as such, only students actively seeking to learn more about these initiatives will encounter them.

The Task Force's focus group with the YCC offered further insight into to how the dining experience may be further improved. Though the participants expressed gratitude for the prevalence of vegetables in entrees and a full salad bar, some have found difficulties with the overall variety, with one student stating, "[...] it seems like healthy options are there but variety isn't, so if you want a healthy meal you have to eat same thing meal after meal." A second participant added, "Sometimes the salad bar is the only healthy thing in the dining hall." Others expressed concern that the salad bars tend to completely run out of certain ingredients at high-traffic times, compelling them to eat dinner earlier than desired. Beyond salad bars, the focus group expressed an interest in a wider variety of fruits, and one participant asked for healthier beverage options beyond the spa water available in each dining hall. Perhaps the two greatest takeaways are that students are genuinely interested in healthy eating and hope to see the expansion of the current efforts in the near future.

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. We find that Yale Dining has already successfully spearheaded sustainability projects and programs. Moving forward, we recommend expanding partnerships within the local community to engage students with the principles of sustainability and introduce them to the resources the region has to offer.
2. Waste management at each dining hall should be reviewed, with particular emphasis on determining which spaces are well-coordinated and organized and which fall short. This can set the framework for future initiatives involving waste reduction, with an eventual goal of producing little to no waste in dining spaces across campus.
3. We strongly recommend that Yale Dining forms a dietitian program accessible to all students interested in healthier eating at Yale and beyond. Similarly, we suggest that Dining explores ways of engaging students in a manner akin to the Food Literacy Fellowship Program at Harvard. Such a program would allow for students with an interest in nutrition, agriculture, leadership, food preparation, sustainability, and event design to connect with individuals with similar interests; these students could themselves serve as resources for their peers. Should this initiative be too large of an undertaking, we recommend the reestablishment of the Dining Standing Committee to incorporate student input into the decisions

of Yale Dining. Many of Dining's campaigns, events, and initiatives could be further enriched by having a focus on nutrition education; students would appreciate engaging with Dining's efforts to make our food healthier.

IV. Clarity and Communication

The final section of the report addresses ways in which to improve communication between Yale Dining and the student body. This section will first describe points of confusion for students. It will then propose modifications to the Yale Dining website and social media presence, as well as provide recommendations on how to effectively design accessible feedback forms.

Points of Confusion

In our research, we found that many students are unaware of the full scope of Yale Dining and its services. As we will describe later in this section, only one participant in our focus group knew where students could provide feedback on the website. Very few participants were aware that every dining hall not only has physical suggestion boxes within the facility, but also an option to provide feedback within the mobile application. Although the boxes are not as prominent as in the past because mobile reviews have largely taken over their purpose, we will note that the in-app review system is not prominently displayed or advertised either.

We have also noted the confusion between the “unlimited” swipes provided by the ‘Anytime’ meal plan, and the ability for students with any plan to swipe as many times as they would like during any meal period. Our focus group demonstrated that many students were unaware of the capability to do the latter, and as such, we invited each council member to test out the continuous swiping system. Many of those who reported back found no issues with swiping multiple times, though some did note that if they mentioned they had swiped elsewhere to the staffer at the front desk, they were initially told they were not allowed to do so. There is a need to clarify this policy not only to students, but staff members as well so that no one encounters further confusion or difficulty.

The Task Force would also like to restate an issue that has previously been addressed but not fully rectified. Yale Dining makes an admirable commitment to provide accurate nutritional information for all of its dishes, and the majority of dishes are properly labeled with all necessary ingredients and warnings. However, there are still lapses in consistency, where ingredients are improperly labeled or entire entrees are simply not labeled at all. Furthermore, one focus group participant expressed concern over ingredient and allergen listings on the mobile application, stating that they are sometimes not accurate or missing. We would like to reiterate that a completely

accurate labeling system is integral to the health and wellbeing of students, especially those with dietary needs and restrictions.

The mobile application itself was the subject of confusion within our focus group as well. Several students noted that entrees and offerings listed on the app occasionally are not present once they arrive at the dining hall. We recognize that this is in part due to changing availability over the course of meal periods, though a handful of participants noted that they arrived early to the dining hall and still encountered this problem. According to one member, "There are also times where [the app] is completely inaccurate and you realize not a single thing listed is actually there, and that is really problematic." Another specifically mentioned their frustration with Commons – a spot frequented due to its later lunch hours – stating that arriving late is difficult as many of the entrees listed on the app have already run out by that time. In light of these concerns, we feel that having a staff member in each dining facility provide real-time updates would remedy much of the confusion over daily offerings, especially when an entrée is replaced before a meal period begins.

Finally, there appears to be confusion regarding the to-go bagged lunch option. As one participant mentioned, they have requested for a bagged lunch in the past, though upon arrival they found that "some dining staffers don't know [about the program]." Similarly, no participants seemed aware of the "2Go" option on the Yale Dining website and application, which allows for one to request bagged lunches online. As mentioned earlier, 33% of students miss a meal at least once a week due to their busy schedules. Advertising the existence of the "2Go" program to both students and staff would be of great benefit to this constituency. Furthermore, the additional 37% that "rarely" misses meals likely would make use of a program that allows them to take out dining hall food in cases when they are unable to sit down. This has the potential to alleviate demand for locations like Durfee's, which is often swamped with students looking to use their unused lunch swipe on days they cannot eat in a dining hall.

Improving Communications

Yale Dining provides information to students through a variety of outlets, most prominently its website, application, and school-wide emails. However, the shortfalls of these measures are evidenced by the aforementioned confusion over many policies, including the continuous swipe, bagged lunch offerings, and feedback forms. As such, we have examined the policies employed by other universities within the Ivy League in

search of ways to improve the existing approaches Yale Dining takes to spreading news and information.

Updating the Website

The main page of Yale's website features three main bubbles to click on which read: "where to eat," "what we offer," and "who we are." These three categories also include 5-6 subdivisions underneath the primary title with supplementary information. To the left of these options, there are a plethora of additional tabs to click on including an events calendar, operating schedule, Yale catering's page, and a form for feedback. The calendar section seems greatly underutilized, as it does not list many of the events Dining sponsors each semester; for instance, the calendar makes no mention of the popular guest chef dinners or annual Founder's Day festivities. Other sections, like the "Menu and Nutrition Center," appear to thoroughly provide the information a student might seek. While such a wealth of data is highly beneficial to Yale students, the organization of such information leaves much to be desired. For a student quickly scrolling through the page to find information about their meal plan or the daily menu, the current model is tedious and overwhelming, with much of the information presented as unappealing blocks of text or tables.

[Harvard Dining Service's](#) website serves as a prime example of how Yale can consolidate information and increase the aesthetics of its website. The site is extremely visually pleasing in its modern layout and inclusion of a stream of rotating photographs featuring dining hall offerings. Additionally, information is laid out clearly and concisely. This website is more manageable than Yale's, answering almost all of the same questions in a more appealing and accessible way.

Mobile, Social Dining

Another crucial part of communications is the "Fast Track" mobile application, which freshmen are encouraged to download during Camp Yale but tends to go unutilized thereafter. This application features dining hall hours, a daily menu with nutritional information for the present day and the following one, scales of how crowded each dining hall is during hours of operation, and thorough information about retail options. It also includes tabs with a map of each dining hall in the context of Yale's campus, Eli Bucks, and to go order form.

Nonetheless, there are significant problems with the Fast Track application in its current state - incidentally, the iOS version of the application has not been updated

since August 13, 2013. As previously mentioned, menus occasionally fail to show up on any given day, resulting in an entirely blank page or relatively normal layout excluding one whole meal while including the other two. Besides the inconvenience, this common error is extremely problematic for students who want to know what to expect in the dining hall due to allergies or complications. On a similar note, the nutritional information, traits, and ingredients included when clicking upon an individual dish are sometimes erroneous or non-existent. Even though the Eli Bucks and "2Go" options are helpful, it is unclear why they both redirect application users to an external webpage. The Eli Bucks interface allows students to view their meal plan and transactions, or even schedule email reminders of current balances; having this instead as an in-app feature would greatly bolster its practicality. Transforming this tab into a "Meal Plan management" section, along with improvements to the menus and information provided, would allow the application to move beyond a measure of gauging the traffic of dining halls. Similarly, making the "Orders 2Go" option an in-app feature would allow a greater number of students to easily access the system wherever they are; that way, they can request for to go meals or late plates as soon as conflicts arise.

Looking at other universities, Columbia Dining's application includes similar features, though with a few additions that would greatly improve the practicality of Yale's own application. First, the Dine@CU application allows students to access dining hall news and events from their phone. This is a simple step to allow students to be more aware of topics they may ignore or gloss over due to the constant stream of emails Yalies receive. Columbia's software also has a place to "submit suggestions and feedback with ease." Though Yale's app has a feedback feature, it is not nearly as prominently displayed. Finally, Columbia's application has an option called "My Plate" where students can virtually build a meal and calculate the total nutritional values of their plate. This innovative function helps students to visualize dining options, contributing to their overall health and wellness, addressing some of the concerns we have mentioned in the section on "Educational Opportunities."

Another example of marketing innovation within the Ivy League is visible at University of Pennsylvania. The dining team has hired a registered dietician who posts healthy dishes and eating tips to [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) for Penn students. The university maintains a similarly active Facebook page, as well. Yale Dining does have a Twitter account and a Facebook page, though the former has not been updated since March 25, 2015. The Facebook page is much more active, though much of the information provided could be just as easily formulated into a Twitter or Instagram post. A concerted effort to engage students via social media outlets like these would allow

Dining to clarify its offerings and demonstrate the full extent of both daily offerings and special events.

Optimizing Feedback Forms

The Task Force investigated dining feedback systems of peer institutions in order to contextualize the Yale system. Most of these feedback forms can be found online, though some are also accessible through mobile applications.

We have split these feedback systems into two categories: effective and subpar. Effective systems were easily located, had clear interfaces, and allowed for prompt and personalized responses; subpar systems were difficult to locate, had confusing interfaces, and/or did not allow for prompt and personalized responses.

Examples of Effective Feedback Systems

Harvard Dining has an overall modernized, aesthetically pleasing website. Several options for feedback are clearly marked under the respective tabs for [cafes](#), [undergraduate dining](#), and [graduate dining](#). The forms ask for one's name, location, phone number, and email address. Beyond this required information, there is an open box for comments as well as a simple security measure to prevent unsolicited submissions.

[Dartmouth's feedback form](#) and [Cornell's form](#) are similarly easy to locate. For Dartmouth, it can be found on the homepage under the 'Contact Us' tab; meanwhile, Cornell's can be found displayed on the page under 'How to... Give Us Feedback,' with no searching through tabs required. The forms ask for the commenter's name, location, and email address – Cornell's form has an added guarantee of a response within three business days.

Of these three, the Harvard model appears most effective, with a fresh site design and an ability to sort one's comments based on their location. This allows for specialized feedback to the cafes, undergraduate, and graduate dining halls.

Examples of Subpar Feedback Systems

The Brown Dining Service website appears somewhat outdated, and it is difficult to locate any sort of outlet for feedback. A section for '[General comments and feedback](#)'

can be found under the 'Contact Us' section of the site; however, there is no actual online form to fill out, as the links simply lead to the email addresses for point people. The same is true for [Penn Dining](#), where feedback is mentioned only at the very bottom of their FAQ page. Princeton Dining, meanwhile, makes no mention of feedback anywhere on its site.

Our assessment of [Columbia Dining](#) is somewhat more complicated. Although it has an easily accessible link at the top of their webpage, it takes the form of a public and anonymous forum. Though the visibility of the process is commendable, more negative comments are met with responses to the effect of "We will look more into this," rather than commitments to improvement. Though the anonymity might prompt a greater response rate, it also removes the possibility of follow-up to individual questions. The mobile application addresses the follow-up concerns to some extent, as feedback section is also simple to find and allows for students to submit a photo of their Columbia ID if they wish to receive a personal response; this does seem unnecessary, however, as students could enter their university email address with greater ease.

Yale's Feedback System

Yale's student feedback form is more easily accessible than most. Located on the homepage of the Yale Dining website, it is much like the aforementioned effective forms in that there is a place for a student's name, email, affiliation, location, and – unique to Yale's form – subject. The Dining mobile application also provides an opportunity to give feedback, though it is a bit more disguised; one must first tap on an individual location, then tap the information button where a feedback option is displayed. It is more or less an abridged version of the online form and has a 120-character limit, so it seems most useful for on-the-spot reviews and recommendations rather than in-depth feedback.

Despite the relative ease with which one can access feedback forms, there appears to be a lack of understanding that these options even exist among the student body. Our focus group revealed that only one student of approximately 45 participants could explain how to find the feedback forms. Furthermore, no students were aware of the dining hall specific feedback forms on the mobile application. In order for Dining to expand its commitment to valuing student feedback, these online and mobile forms should be made far more visible and accessible.

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. Yale Dining should revamp its current website to make it more user-friendly and clear, much like Harvard Dining's model. We are aware that such a redesign has already been in the works, though we would like to emphasize that the new website should address the "Points of Concern" from above, especially those involving meal plans and swipes. Furthermore, visually appealing and easy-to-use nutritional tabs, feedback sections, and resource listings can further enhance the site's convenience and versatility.
2. Dining should consider a redesign or update to the Fast Track mobile application, which has not been changed since 2013. Meal plan organization and "2Go" options can be incorporated directly into the app. Finally, measures should be taken to ensure that all nutritional labels are accurate for each menu item in the dining halls, especially on the application.
3. A greater social media presence would modernize communications and connect to a largely online student population. Its already existing social media accounts can be used for creating and advertising events, displaying informational posters, providing updates on projects and services, and perhaps more creative ideas, like hosting "spotlight" campaigns for certain staffers or dining halls.
4. Feedback forms should be easily accessible through a variety of outlets, including Dining's website, mobile application, and even physically in the dining halls. Our research has shown that few students actually know how and where to provide their input; this can be fixed by displaying feedback options prominently in the various places where it can be given, both online and in-person. Social media sites also can be used as mechanisms for providing feedback - or at very least they can facilitate the process by linking students to where they can bring their suggestions.

V. Conclusion

As Yale students, we are grateful for the services Yale Dining provides us and the community it fosters through such a large, yet simultaneously intimate operation. It is due to Dining's admirable willingness to improve itself and the provisions it brings to students that we have written this report – to issue a student-sourced perspective on a system so integral to our wellbeing.

First, the Task Force believes that dining hall hours and meal plans serve as the most pressing areas of concern. Many students struggle to find time to sit down for meals, causing additional stress on already busy schedules full of classes, meetings, and extracurricular commitments. Furthermore, confusion exists regarding meal plans, as many have questioned the extent of their provisions. When coupled with the fact that Yale has some of the most expensive meal plans in the Ivy League, it is clear that there exists a need for a review of both hours and costs.

Second, increased communication and greater accessibility should be central to Dining. Certain aspects of Yale Dining's policies and resources need to be clarified - from the double swiping policy, to discrepancies in certain meal plans, to nutritional labels on all food items. An effective social media presence, mobile application, and website all can contribute to improving student understanding of features and events Yale Dining provides; at present, each of these three elements seem somewhat lacking.

Finally, furthering Yale Dining's commitment to sustainability and food education serve as lower-priority yet nevertheless important goals. Though we are aware that sustainability practices are already excellent, we would like to note that expanding partnerships with local and even internal organizations could be an enriching experience for many students. In that same vein, creating programs that directly engage students with their health and personal nutrition could serve to benefit the overall wellness of the community. These changes likely would take place over a longer period of time, as new initiatives can be explored each year to decide what is most effective in terms of cost and student engagement.

Over time, we hope to see some of our suggestions and recommendations implemented into Dining's services. We truly value the opportunity to attend a university with such an outstanding, committed dining program and are appreciative of the engagement and enthusiasm we have encountered thus far from the Yale Dining administration.

VI. Acknowledgements

This report was authored by Kevin Sullivan (Morse '18, Director), Abby Troy (Pierson '18), Michaela Cloutier (Calhoun '18), Daniel Hamidi (Davenport '18), Jorge Lema (Berkeley '19), and Arabelle Schoenberg (Pierson '19).

We would like to acknowledge and thank the participation of over 1,500 undergraduates in the YCC Fall Survey, whose input we could not have written the report without. We would also like to thank the YCC Executive Board, Elected Representatives, and Associate Representatives for the perspectives they shared for our focus group.

Finally, we would like to thank the Yale Dining administration for their engagement and enthusiasm over this report – particularly Executive Director Rafi Taherian and Director of Residential Dining Operations Bob Sullivan.

VII. Appendix

2015 YCC Fall Survey Results

The 2015 YCC Fall Survey was sent to all undergraduates by email on October 25th of that year. By the close of the survey on November 1st, 1,519 responses were received.

1. Class Year

#	Answer	Response	%
1	2019	434	29%
2	2018	422	28%
3	2017	387	25%
4	2016	276	18%
	Total:	1519	100%

2. How often do you skip a meal in the dining hall due to a tight schedule? (AH)

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Every day	135	10%
2	3-5 times a week	72	5%
3	1-2 times a week	239	18%
4	Rarely	489	37%
5	Never	384	29%
	Total:	1319	100%

3. If certain dining halls were open for extended dinner hours, what would your ideal closing time be?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	8:00 PM	409	31%
2	9:00 PM	530	41%
3	9:30 PM	146	11%
4	10:00 PM	179	14%
5	Other	42	3%
	Total:	1306	100%

4. I am satisfied with the cost of my meal plan.

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Strongly agree	26	2%
2	Agree	154	12%
3	Neither	446	34%
4	Disagree	433	33%
5	Strongly disagree	261	20%
	Total:	1320	100%