

Students call to remedy food insecurity

Individual students voice their concerns about meal affordability on campus

By Giselle Barajas
and Olivia Doak
WatchTower Team

When the only option for a meal plan costs \$5,378 per year, students can struggle to afford one. At schools Augustana compares itself to – other small, liberal arts colleges – like Carthage, the same standard meal plan costs \$3,210. At Illinois Wesleyan, plans start at \$3,952.

For sophomore Bobby Rowe, the inability to afford a meal plan affordability at Augie became his reality. After Rowe went to the Robert Young Mental Health Center in January, he started seeking accommodations during spring term for PTSD, depression and anxiety.

However, “two [professors] sort of implied, ‘maybe you should take less [medication] to be successful in school,’” Rowe said. Consequently, Rowe said, “I didn’t take pills for three days and that put me in the hospital again.”

Rowe felt safe going back to Robert Young. According to Rowe, he was promised support from Augie. “[They] told me that if I would go in the hospital, they would help me get food, they would help me set up housing, all these things,” Rowe said.

However, that’s not what ended up happening. After Rowe got out of the hospital, he had three days to leave his dorm with no financial means to support himself. “Help with food turned into eliminating my meal plan,” Rowe said. “And now I’m homeless and struggling. I created a GoFundMe, so now I’m struggling a lot less, but I don’t think it was necessary for me to create a GoFundMe.”

According to Rowe, he isn’t the only student affected by a similar experience. “I do know a couple people...it’s not about me. This is a campus-wide thing.”

Senior Colleen Prosek agrees with Rowe, saying, “I could definitely understand for other people and, at times, myself how affording a meal plan could be difficult,” Prosek said.



Thea Gonzales/Observer Staff

Sophomore Bobby Rowe discusses his experience with food accessibility. Many students including Rowe struggle to access food consistently on campus.

Prosek, an advocate for food conservation, said that she pays for college on her own without her parents aid, relying on financial aid, loans and money from her job. “Sometimes it comes down to, do I really want that many meals? I really have to think about it,” Prosek said.

She also said that she doesn’t feel like she gets her money’s worth from her meal plan. “Especially when you go to the CC and get so much less food. For a \$10 meal swipe, it’s not worth it,” Prosek said. Even when at the the dining hall, Prosek said, “I don’t feel like that amount of money is what it’s worth.”

To try to combat this, Student Government Association (SGA) is working with administration to increase meal plan flexibility. Currently, underclassmen are required to have the 12, 15, 19 or unlimited meals. In addition to those options, upperclassmen can purchase 75 or 90 meals per term or opt out of a meal plan. There are a few changes to these meal plans that will likely be going into effect next year. However, these changes won’t impact cost of meal plans.

One of these changes will allow students to swipe four times a day instead of three, in addition to having more guest swipes per semester. The other involves meal plan carry-over. For example, if a student has a

15-meal swipe plan and only uses 12, then the three unused meals will carry over to the next week. However, no more than

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-Bobby Rowe

three meals would be carried over each week. Kirk Anderson the vice president of finance and administration oversees everything related to dining. He said that for the price, Augustana offers a wide variety of options that other schools don’t. However, affording a meal plan is an obstacle for students to overcome.

When discussing the affordability of

these meal plans, Anderson said, “Sometimes we realize it’s not the best interest for a student to be here because they can’t afford it and they realize that, too. That’s real and that’s one of the tougher pieces.”

To combat the issue of food insecurity, Campus Kitchen provides meals for students in the Brew about once or twice every month. They also partner with Campus Cupboard to provide food and other necessities.

When addressing why Campus Kitchen can’t provide food more often than they already do, a first-year volunteer for Campus Kitchen, remaining anonymous per request, stated, “[We] don’t have huge resources to do it every week.”

The student volunteer also stressed that “it’s not just resources, we need more student power. We need more students who can help and more cooperation from the CSL.”

The same student is also employed in the dining center and said that not all the food can be repurposed for Campus Kitchen. “It’s against the health code violation,” they said.

Fred Kurt, who directs and oversees dining services, said that most of the waste that happens in dining comes from the consumers. “The average amount of waste is about four ounces per meal per person,” Kurt said, which constitutes the waste people leave on their plates.

The student employee added that, “sometimes [students] don’t even eat half of the food. We don’t have any other choices but to throw them [the food] away.”

There are various solutions taking place within the dining hall to minimize waste. However, if it’s against health code violations, there’s not much the school can do.

Prosek said, “you pay what I feel like is a significant amount of money,” and she supported the idea that more of the budget should be utilized to cut down waste. “I think things like [food conservation] should be more present on campus, to help the environment and save food,” she said.



Alia McMurray/Observer Staff

Students serve themselves free food in the Brew, courtesy of Campus Kitchen. Campus Kitchen repurposes leftover food from the dining center for students to take free of charge once or twice a month.

Post-meal plan: the easier choice isn't the healthy one

By Thea Gonzales
WatchTower Team

I'm going to be honest. The last time I ate a healthy, handmade, sit-down meal that wasn't at a fast food place was during Easter break at my parents' house.

That's because after you've socially and financially "graduated" out of the dining center meal plans, every accessible and affordable culinary decision is found on 38th street by Wendy's and Taco Bell. For the majority of college juniors and seniors, the phrase "meal prep" is associated with "two hours away from what I actually need to do."

The decision we make then isn't a time saver: we are stealing health and wellness away from ourselves.

Part of me wants to rage and blame our surroundings. There are approximately 10 fast food restaurants less than five miles away from campus, but there are

only *three* grocery stores within the same parameters of hours and distance.

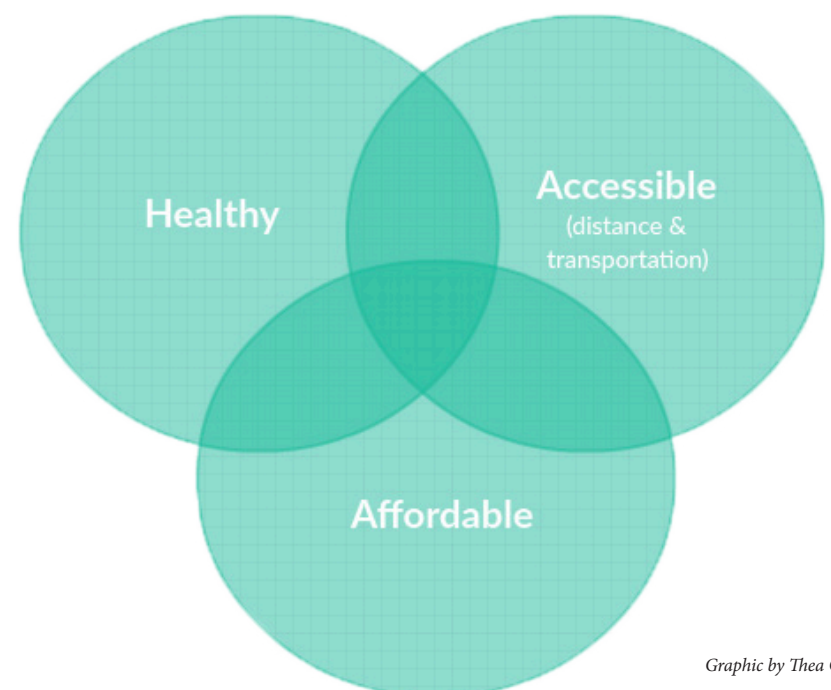
That means that for many of us, we're living meal to meal and drive-thru to drive-thru, praying after class and work that the doors are still open to Dunkin because going inside takes so much less time than shouting your order into a metal box and waiting in line with the other cars.

Part of me wants to rage and blame our surroundings, but the more adult part of me (she does exist, I promise) wants to see this inequity as some sort of cosmic, institutional challenge to do better.

Sure, making a spinach wrap for lunch tomorrow, mixing your overnight oats for breakfast or putting something in the slow cooker for the rest of the week might add hours to your weekly routine. But it's also arguably adding years onto your life.

We owe it to ourselves to do better, to practice more responsibility and to critically investigate our own wellness.

Pick two of the following:



Graphic by Thea Gonzales