

These views are not indicative of the Undergraduate Association or the student representatives.

Q: What is the Blue Ribbon Dining Committee?

A: The Blue Ribbon Dining Committee is a collection of students, faculty and administrators that have come together to review dining on campus as charged by the Dean of Student Life in this document: <http://web.mit.edu/ua/docs/exec/brdc/Committee%20Charge.pdf>

Q: Why do you think dining on campus will be fixed by adding more expensive, unappealing, and fiscally irresponsible dining halls, when you already know that the majority of students prefer not to eat at dining halls and are dissatisfied with the expensive meal plans?

A: The Blue Ribbon Committee has made NO recommendations to add a dining hall on campus. In fact, one major discussion point is do we really need all the dining halls on campus? Rich Berlin has said that at many other schools with MIT's level of dining participation, there would be a single dining hall. However, students are actually using these dining halls: in an October 2007 survey, four out of five dining halls had a participation rate of greater than 50% over a five day period. The Committee looked at a satisfaction survey done two years ago (Fall '06), and overall satisfaction of the dining program was 3.48 (on a scale of 1-5). We recognize that a dining program that is not met with positive student reaction will not be successful at MIT. The Blue Ribbon Dining Committee did not decide to put a dining hall in W1, nor did it dictate that it be all-you-care-to-eat (the pilot group voted unanimously for that). MIT has a wide range of eating preferences and the committee has been committed to providing options that will work for all students.

Q: Why doesn't MIT just look at a successful dining program at another similar-sized school, and model our program after that one? We should not try to reinvent the wheel.

A: If we did that, chances are everyone would have a mandatory dining plan. Almost every college in the country makes money off of its dining plan by forcing students to eat most meals in a dining hall. MIT does not do that and the survey results clearly show that students enjoy their choice in the matter. We have benchmarked our food service against several other schools when investigating factors such as average yearly cost, number of dining halls, and meal plan options, but this was only one part of our data collection.

Q: Why is there any need to even discuss something like a mandatory dining plan? It seems that it would only benefit the organizations that actually run the dining halls; students would end up paying about the same rates anyway.

A: This group would be remiss if it did not consider a model that almost every other college uses. Having a mandatory meal plan would allow a considerable amount of flexibility in dining hours (dining halls could be open earlier/later) and options (breakfast/late night). We can't add hours and options to a system that isn't currently financially feasible. Also, having a mandatory fee might help students in procuring additional financial aid for food because financial aid rarely pays for optional components. That being said, MIT isn't like 'every other college' and we have to weigh this decision carefully given our diverse cooking preferences.

Q: We really need a cafeteria! We are the only collegiate university that does not provide convenient accessible and quality food to students. Residential dining halls don't fit this category as they are pay per item, only available for dinner, and extremely limited in food offerings. What aspects of your recommendations are going to reflect this most essential need?

We haven't really considered this aspect of dining in detail, because we were under the impression that W1 would be offering this exact service. However; with the project delayed we will have to consider other locations to house such a program. You are not alone in your desire: over 50% of respondents desired some form of all-you-care-to-eat dining hall.

Q: Why is there concern over having students eat healthy, and what is this possibly proposed mandatory dining fee? Since I don't think the committee should be concerned whether students eat healthy, only that there are health options provided.

A: The concern about students eating healthy comes from the survey data. It was found that less than 20% of undergraduates ate a well-balanced diet and we think that single data point reveals a flaw in our current dining system. The committee has decided that it wants to encourage students to eat healthier and possible solutions discussed include education and menu changes in dining halls.

Q: What is wrong with the current dining plan?

A: This is essentially what we are writing a long report about. Some common trends that came out of the report: students want more late night options, students want more affordable options, students want more breakfast options, students want an all-you-care-to-eat option, and students want more dietary options (kosher/vegan/etc).

Q: Whatever recommendation is made, will students have a say in it (for real, not just as a token), and will students get to see what it is before it turns from a recommendation into an actual implemented plan?

A: The committee has nine undergraduate representatives on it. As the process to change becomes clear, key decision makers we have talked to have stated that there would be reviews of this document by students in meetings such as the Task Force for Student Engagement and the Undergraduate Association Senate meetings (which are open to all students). Any unpopular implementation of dining recommendations would result in a financial loss for MIT which doesn't benefit anyone.

Q: How is monopolized dining on campus supposed to benefit students? Food service is ALREADY far too monopolized, and prices are already fixed at unreasonable levels. So why should everyone on campus be forced to enroll in a program that is effectively aimed at taking more of our money?

A: Food service on campus is not monopolized. We have all three of the major food service companies and eighteen plus food vendors providing for MIT. Looking at the survey data, prices are not that unreasonable: the average student spends about \$5 for dinner in a dining hall, \$7 for dinner on campus but not in a dining hall, \$9 off campus, and \$10 to order in (although it was unclear if students factored in the cost Preferred Dining). Food is comparable in price to the surrounding options. The mandatory

dining idea is not “aimed at taking more of our money,” because you can spend the money however you like: at a dining hall, a grocery store, some restaurants, and cafes around campus. The Committee would not support any idea that cost students without providing increased options and hours.

Q: It seems like the Blue Ribbon Dining Committee is not using scientific evidence to come up with its recommendations, and instead coming up with ideas and trying to "match them" to the data on hand. Why doesn't the committee make the data-sets public so that everyone can come up with ideas based on data? Making data public also provides an extra safety check since anyone can verify the results.

A: The Committee has promised to release the full data set with our recommendations. This process embodies the scientific process: we have collected data, we are going to present our idea on what we feel these data say about how dining should be changed on campus, and then we are going to publish our work so that it can be independently evaluated. None of the recommendations we make are going to be final and senior administrators will make the final decision in any implementations with the input of students. We have also engaged a consultant as part of the Blue Ribbon Committee process that brings expertise in evaluating this kind of data and an independent and objective perspective to our evaluation.

Q: What are you doing to make sure that the proposed dining plans will provide well balanced meals? (ie fruit and vegetables?)

A: One of recommendations involves increasing the amount of student review into dining. We want to regularly review the menus, service, price, etc. within dining halls to ensure students’ needs are being met and if not, what changes need to be made. The Committee agrees that students need to have input into the food that dining halls serve because it doesn’t benefit anyone to have an empty dining hall. We don’t have concrete details on this recommendation yet, but it is definitely favored by the entire Committee.

One example of why the Committee has been considering an all-you-care-to-eat option (AYCE): the AYCE option would also allow for more of an open menu as the price will be a flat rate, no matter what food you choose. For example, in the Simmons pilot of AYCE, milk usage went way up compared to the milk purchase with the a la carte system. The ‘invisibility’ of the price of milk led to more students choosing milk, in the current a la carte system price is more visible and seemed to serve as a deterrent to selection.

Q: Will you have exceptions and opt-out options for people in living groups who are already paying for food provided by said group? For example, members of French House pay several hundred dollars a semester for dinner every night, and members of ILGS and Fraternities usually pay for a meal plan at their house. As a member of ET and French House, I am very concerned that I may end up paying three different people to eat.

A: This was one of the first issues brought up by student representatives when the possibility of a mandatory dining fee was proposed. The Committee has agreed to allow all FSILG members to opt-out because most of these students already pay a mandatory dining fee at their residence that conceptually

represents a commitment to nutrition. We haven't brought up cultural houses specifically, but there has been intense debate about where the line should be drawn regarding who should be able to opt-out of this fee (if it is recommended). There hasn't been complete agreement yet so we don't have a full answer for this question.

Q: Will you please eliminate preferred dining so that the cost of dining is spread out across campus instead of burdening the people who live in dorms with dining halls? I don't eat at dining (because I don't like the food and don't feel that it's healthy or has enough variety), yet I have to pay a huge fee.

A: Blue Ribbon has discussed preferred dining at length and it is clear that students have not had a positive reaction to paying for a discount on food. Obviously, spreading out the cost of dining over the entire campus would require some form of mandatory dining fee and that doesn't seem to be a popular option (students surveyed don't want a mandatory fee). In addition, it doesn't seem fair to make students in dorms with kitchens pay for a service they won't use (see the next question).

Q: Many residents of kitchen dorms have no stake in dining. If campus dining immediately abandoned all services that lose money, there would be barely any affect on those residents. Why should these people be asked to make sacrifices and compromises to support a system they don't use. If your answer is some appeal to some greater good of the MIT undergraduate population why aren't FSILGs being forced to help support the dining halls?

A: It is unclear how you believe the Blue Ribbon Committee is asking residents of kitchen dorms to "make sacrifices and compromises to support a system they don't use." We are going to assume you are talking about the possibility of a mandatory dining fee. A mandatory fee would be awful if students that want to cook couldn't use their contribution to the program to purchase groceries. For that reason the Committee has agreed that it is important for those students to be able to use their contribution to buy from places like Starr, Shaws, Trader Joes, Whole Foods, and Harvest Co-op. Of course, this doesn't solve the whole problem. We are still discussing how we could allow for students to shop at Haymarket, Costco, and ethnic markets. We recognize this is a current drawback of the idea. Regarding FSILGs, it was mentioned earlier that they already pay a mandatory dining fee and it is more a matter of convenience to Dining that they can opt-out. Otherwise the money paid by those students would simply be forwarded to their residence.

Q: Why the hell is LaVerdes so expensive and so terrible? Ever since they changed ownership, prices have increased ~50% and service has gone down.

A: The Blue Ribbon Committee cannot dictate prices or service conditions to LaVerdes market. LaVerdes has a long-term lease on the space and just like any business, they are going to charge what people are willing to pay.

Q: When NW35 was built last year, ovens were installed in every student's room. However, shortly before term and simultaneous with making the dining program there mandatory, the ovens were removed without comment. Now every "kitchen" counter in NW35 has a gaping hole where an oven

once stood. Will the BRDC continue favoring commercial profit-making interests over student nutrition, or will NW35 get its ovens back?

A: If the Blue Ribbon Committee favored commercial profit-making interests over student nutrition, then NW35 wouldn't have a dining hall since MIT's dining halls lose money. We haven't seriously discussed NW35's kitchens thus far, so this is a great point that we can discuss at a future meeting. Hopefully we will have better answer for you in our next round of responses.

Q: There seems to be a lot of focus on the BRDC survey from the spring, which suggests that the analysis for the BRDC's recommendations is going to be statistics-based. Is the BRDC also considering use-case, i.e., have you considered different hypothetical students and how a dining plan would satisfy their needs (e.g. athletes, performance groups students, students with health concerns like celiac disease)?

A: As part of our initial investigation, the Blue Ribbon Committee also had several focus groups for students (categories included athletes, house dining members, and other students). In all recommendations we have considered, we have had discussion about if these decisions would have on students with different time and money constraints. In terms of students with health concerns, we believe the program would remain fairly similar: MIT will try to accommodate your nutritional needs, but if it cannot then you won't be required to participate. That is MIT's current policy for people with highly restricted diets in dining halls under the current plan and we don't believe the Committee will recommend changes to that policy.

Q: Why isn't the list of committee members posted anywhere?...

A: This issue has been resolved. A complete listing of the committee members is available here: <http://web.mit.edu/ua/docs/exec/brdc/Committee%20Membership.pdf>

If your question wasn't answered here:

Ask one of the student representatives on the committee.