

FLEXIBLE MEAL PLANS: A KEY TO STUDENT SUCCESS AND WELL-BEING

From meals to meaningful engagement, how flexible meal plans boost retention and revenue

Higher education institutions are facing a myriad of challenges today, including rising costs, smaller incoming cohorts, retention, shifts in generational expectations, and the evolving demographics of traditional college students. Flexible and customized campus dining offerings, beyond traditional resident meal plans, play an integral role in combating both the financial pressures of the institution and declining student retention. This meal plan supports student needs and desires for more personalization while offering an additional revenue stream.

As the cost of furthering one's education continues to rise, so does student debt, prompting many students and families to question the value of a degree. Institutions are exploring various initiatives to make education more affordable, such as tuition-free programs, dual enrollment, and financial aid reforms. Additionally, as students' progress in their collegiate careers, many seek non-traditional housing options, including off-campus apartments or co-living spaces, driven by a desire for independence and diverse living experiences.

Furthermore, with the "enrollment cliff," a smaller incoming cohort will begin in 2025 due to fewer students born 18 years ago. Institutions must develop strategies to address this challenge. Possible approaches include expanding recruitment efforts, enhancing student retention programs, and diversifying their offerings.

Campus dining plays a crucial role in offsetting such challenges. Dining facilities serve as central hubs for social interactions, fostering a sense of community and belonging among students. Access to nutritious meals and comfortable dining spaces contributes to students' overall well-being and mental health. Meal plans provide convenience and ensure students have access to regular meals, which is crucial for maintaining energy and academic focus. They also encourage students to stay on campus, enhancing their engagement with campus activities. Shared meals offer opportunities for students to connect with peers, faculty, and staff, strengthening their social network.

47%

of Americans believe college is only worth it if students don't have to take out loans

INSIDE HIGHER EDUCATION, MAY 2024

Aramark's Connect Campus program, formerly Commuter Declining Balance, is designed to support commuter students and help increase revenue for the institution by providing flexible dining options. This program offers declining balance, block plans, and weekly plans for on-campus dining locations, making it easier for students residing off campus to access meals and stay connected to campus life. By offering convenient dining options, Connect Campus helps students and the participating University/ College in the following ways:

STUDENT BENEFITS:

- Supports student success by ensuring food security for those on campus.
- On-campus dining and meal-time socialization are more convenient.
- Students with dietary restrictions can enjoy meals in a safe environment.
- Financial aid and scholarships can be applied toward the balance.
- The balance is linked to the student's ID, so there is no need to carry credit cards or cash.
- Easy way to budget for food and beverages.
- Provides flexibility to purchase items across campus dining locations.

UNIVERSITY / COLLEGE BENEFITS:

- Creates a sense of community that further supports retention by encouraging on-campus dining and seamlessly includes commuter students.
- A flexible, easy-to-use dining experience attracts and engages students.
- Dining program costs are spread among a larger population, helping to drive revenue and support dining program enhancements.
- Supports expanded dining options, including popular retail brands.



23%

of college students reported facing food insecurity

US GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE



44%

of students said convenience of the location was the deciding factor in their last on-campus meal choice

COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY KEYNOTEREPORTS/
DATASSENTIAL



36%

of college students say a plan is cheaper than eating off campus

COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY KEYNOTEREPORTS/
DATASSENTIAL



24%

of first-year college students don't return for their second year to any school

NATIONAL STUDENT CLEARINGHOUSE RESEARCH
CENTER

Program Examples



HUNTINGDON COLLEGE

MONTGOMERY, AL

Total Full-Time Undergraduate Enrollment	900
Mandatory Requirement	Block 30 with \$300 Flex Points* <small>*All commuters</small>



AUBURN
UNIVERSITY

AUBURN UNIVERSITY

AUBURN, AL

Total Full-Time Undergraduate Enrollment	24,135
Mandatory Requirement	\$425 Dining Dollars* <small>*All upperclassmen residents and commuters</small>



PALM BEACH ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY

WEST PALM BEACH, FL

Total Full-Time Undergraduate Enrollment	2,136
Mandatory Requirement	\$300 Flex* <small>*All PBAU commuter students, not including online students</small>

Programs like Aramark's Connect Campus are essential in ensuring that all students, including those who reside off campus, have access to the benefits of on-campus dining. This strengthens their connection to the college experience and drives revenue for the institution.

See how Aramark Collegiate Hospitality can enhance your student dining experience.

CONTACT US

For more information visit us at:

[ARAMARK.COM/COLLEGIATEHOSPITALITY](https://aramark.com/collegiatehospitality)