

Student Customer Survey

Objective:

- Increase the overall use of glasses and china instead of Styrofoam cups and containers.
- Improve the overall layout and flow of the South Campus Dining Facility.
- Increase overall use and student attitude about the South Campus Dining Facility

Introduction:

When ordering and purchasing their meals, students are given the opportunity to choose whether they will eat in the cafeteria or take it out of the cafeteria. Plates and glasses are available for students who eat inside of the cafeteria. If a student wants to take their food out of the cafeteria they are encouraged to use the Styrofoam containers and cups.

University of Maryland is promoting a campus-wide “greening” campaign to increase the use of recycled materials, decrease waste, and otherwise follow more environmentally friendly efforts. The University of Maryland Dining Services supports this greening effort. One method is through decreasing the overall use of Styrofoam containers and cups. To do this they are trying to determine why students choose the Styrofoam options instead of the glasses.

Research from prior University of Maryland Dietetic Interns suggests that students make these choices for a variety of reasons. Students choose the Styrofoam because they believe the Styrofoam is easier to carry and balance, they are under a time crunch and otherwise want to save time, and finally they believe the Styrofoam holds more food (so they are saving money). The most significant reason for students choosing Styrofoam cups is that the cups are in a more accessible area than the glasses.

Managers from South Campus Dining have experimented with a variety of new layouts to make glasses equally as accessible as their Styrofoam counterparts. Since the primary concern of this survey is the use of Styrofoam cups, this survey will discuss some the effectiveness of the layout changes as discussed by students.

Questions:

1. How often do you use the glasses instead of the Styrofoam cups in the dining hall? (circle one)

Very Often Often Sometimes Rarely Never

2. Would you pick glasses more often if they were in a better location?

Yes No

3. If you could make one suggestion to increase the use of glasses instead of Styrofoam what would it be?

4. Do you go to the soda fountain before or after you get your food? (circle one)

Usually first About 50/50 Usually last

5. The managers want students to go in a circle around the dining hall, so they would reach the soda fountains last. Do you have any suggestions on how to encourage students to get their food first then their drinks?

Survey Results:

Students were randomly approached and asked to participate in a short survey during lunch-time at the South Campus Dining Hall. Twenty-nine students agreed to participate. Dietetic interns read the questions to each individual participant and recorded the answers as participants were eating lunch or standing in line to purchase food.

Most of the students (83%) reported they never or rarely use glasses instead of Styrofoam cups in the dining hall. However, 17% of the students stated they use glasses sometimes or often. When participants were asked if they would choose the glasses if they were in a better location, 62% of the students said probably not. The primary reason cited was the inconvenience of walking to the conveyor belt or carrying the tray with the glass around the dining hall. They also stated they were often “on the go”, carried stuff out a lot, and found it easier to carry the take-out containers while in the dining hall.

It is important to note that 31% of the students did state that moving the location of the glasses may increase usage. The majority of students surveyed suggested making it “more convenient to use the glasses” and making them more visible. The most consistent suggestion to increase usage of glasses was to make it inconvenient to use Styrofoam cups. Although getting rid of Styrofoam cups was suggested, that may create more of a problem because so many students take their food out of the dining hall.

One of the objectives of this survey was to address the issue that managers would like students to go to the soda fountain last primarily due to safety concerns from spills. Modifications, such as changes in location of the glasses, have been made to the layout of the dining hall to facilitate this. It is relevant to note that 100% of the students surveyed reported they already go in a circle to get their food and get their beverages last because the beverages are located close to the register. Although participants felt that there was no need to make additional changes, several suggestions were offered.

Limitations to this survey included the random selection of students which may not be representative of the general population of students who eat in South Campus due to the small number of students surveyed, bias in selection of participants, and the time of day.

Recommendations to increase usage of the glasses instead of Styrofoam include the following:

- Glasses should also be available “Late Night”.
- Move the glasses closer to the fountain machine, the Styrofoam cups, or the register for increased visibility.
- Make a better location for return of the used glasses instead of the conveyor belt to increase convenience.
- Move the soda fountain.

- Make it more inconvenient to use Styrofoam by charging more, getting rid of them, making Styrofoam less of an option, and encouraging Styrofoam only for take-out.
- Suggestions to encourage students to go in a circle to get their food included: 1) use signs or arrows to direct traffic, 2) move glasses close to the register, 3) put drinks further away from the front, 4) move Styrofoam closer to the entrance, and 5) put cups back where they were before.

Other Suggestions:

- Place glasses at soda fountain and relocate Styrofoam cups, napkins, and utensils to area near Bakery or Gazebo or place glasses and Styrofoam cups in the same location. This would make the glasses more visible and accessible and make it more inconvenient to use the Styrofoam cups.
- To encourage the usage of reusable cups, charge only \$.99 for refills in these containers.
- Investigate the feasibility of an alternate option to the conveyor belt to be located near the main entrance of the dining hall. Glasses and dishes could be placed in this alternate area by the students and then picked up at intervals by the dining room staff and transported to the conveyor belt or to the dish room.
- Purchase a different type of tray that would be easier for students to carry. Allow students to test out potential trays before purchase if possible.