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### University food services: Student dining expectations, needs and wants versus what is actually received in a mid-size university

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**UNIVERSITY FOOD SERVICES: STUDENT DINING  
EXPECTATIONS, NEEDS AND WANTS VERSUS WHAT IS  
ACTUALLY RECEIVED IN A MID-SIZE UNIVERSITY**

**By**

**Anthony Reale**

**A Thesis Project**

**Hospitality and Service Management Program**

**At**

**Rochester Institute of Technology**

**For the degree of Masters of Science**

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**ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY**  
**Department of Hospitality and Service Management**  
**Graduate Studies**

**M.S. Hospitality-Tourism**  
**Presentation of Thesis/Project Findings**

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Title of Research: University Food Services: Student Dining Expectations, Needs and  
Wants vs. What is Actually Received in a Mid Size University

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*To Martha, Patrick, Emily, and Benjamin,  
Thanks for all of your encouragement, support, and understanding.*

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction**

Welcome to your first day of campus life. You and your roommate have just unpacked all of your worldly belongings when it dawns on you what time it is. You glance at your wristwatch and realize the time is 1:55 PM. You both high tail it up to the dining center as fast as your legs can carry you.

Upon entering the dining room, you are confronted with a woman wearing a white polyester uniform and navy blue apron. She is standing there stoically, like a guard protecting Fort Knox. She begins to shake her finger and announces that the kitchen is closed. She explains that the dining center serves lunch from 11:30 AM and closes promptly at 2:00 PM and will not reopen for dinner until 4:30 PM.

Much to your dismay you realize your only alternative is a can of soda and a bag of potato chips from the vending machine. But wait walking out from behind the shadow of the lunch lady is the dining room manager. She informs you that there are other dining choices besides vending machines available. “Choices”, by definition to pick out or select. This word doesn’t exist in the vocabulary of many university food service departments.

Students aren’t given many alternatives when choosing the time of the day they would like to eat their meals, the types of foods they want to eat or the setting or dining atmosphere. This is mainly due to the fact that the student’s expectations, needs and wants are not considered in the university’s planning process of menus, schedules or development of the facilities.



### **Problem Statement**

Is there quality and service gaps between student dining expectations, needs and wants and what is actually received? If gaps do exist than what impact does this have on a university food service manager and his or her staff, and what can be done to alleviate or rectify the situation.

### **Background**

University food service has come a long way from the cafeteria lines of the past where single entrees were dished out like clockwork on a set schedule three times daily. On today's college campus, students are given a wide range of culinary delights to choose from at various times of the day.

Although overall services have improved, is today's dining services hitting the mark by identifying their customer and fulfilling that customer's expectations, wants and needs. University food services, like all other businesses, are a consumer driven entity. Are university food services today taking into account that the student is their customer?

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze those factors that contribute to the perceived quality and service gaps if any between student dining expectations, their needs and wants and what is actually received

### **Significance**

This study will demonstrate that a university's dining services must understand who its primary customer is, what their expectations, wants and needs are and what implication this will have on the dining experience as a whole. With the information that will be provided by students and dining service management, it may be possible to close or at least build bridges over the perceived quality and serve gaps that may exist.

### **Methodology**

In this study elements of student satisfaction will be examined in the present environment. This study will utilize a survey instrument on student customers in a mid size university in western New York State. The method used will be descriptive and may yield data that will assist the dining services management to meet student's expectations, needs and wants.

### **Literature Review**

Review of literature relevant to this study will include a number of diverse topic areas. These topics comprise service quality, customer satisfaction issues, total quality management, empowerment, theory-based concepts and textbook references. A study of industry-related journals and periodicals, textbooks, and electronic sources may generate the literature of this project.

### **Hypothesis**

This study will reveal the gaps that exist between the student's expectations, needs, and wants and what they actually receive from dining services. By revealing these gaps this study will bring some insight into the importance of customer satisfaction and also show the significance of empowering employees in any given business.

### **Definition of Terms**

Gaps:	Problems that may exist between any of the key players, i.e. students, food service personnel, etc...
External Customer:	A person who comes from outside the business in search of the services provided by the organization, i.e. students.
Empowerment:	The delegating of authority normally reserved for management, to the typical line employee. Often seen in service industries. Considered a major factor in improved customer service and positive employee motivation.
Management:	The people traditionally in charge of the affairs of a business. Usually have a high interest in the success of that business.
Dining Services:	University owned and operated food establishment.
Outsource:	The spinning off or contracting for the operation of various functions and/or services that has traditionally been an internal function of the organization.

## **Assumptions**

### **Ideological Assumptions**

An integral assumption to this study is realizing the gap that exists between the student's expectations, needs and wants and what is actually received. However, I must take extra measures to assure that this study will be free of personal influence in regards to customer dissatisfaction, budget constraints, food quality etc...

### **Procedural Assumptions**

An anonymous survey will be given to students. This survey will be given by random selection. The survey's questions will pertain to matters that deal with the expectations of the selected group.

The participants will be made aware of the survey's objectives prior to taking the survey. All findings will not only be written in this study in the hopes of closing the gap that exists, but will also be available for anyone that participates in the survey or who is interested in the conclusion.

### **Scope and Limitations**

One of the studies limitations is obvious; the survey will only be taken by a small number of the university's students. Another limitations may be that the survey, though not intended as such, may be used as a soapbox to speak ones mind, no matter how limiting the answers to the questions may be.

### **Procedures**

### **Population**

The population of this study is for all universities, but the sample studied is that of a mid-size college in western New York State.

### **Variables (Independent, Dependent, Intervening**

The independent variable in this study would be the handling of customer (student) satisfaction by students, and management. The dependent variable will be the quality of service that is received. The intervening variable would be the ability to identify and close gaps that exist within the system.

### **Data gathering techniques**

Data for this study will be gathered by the use of survey methods. One main group will be surveyed, students who utilize dining services.

### **Long Range Consequences**

Should the finding in this study be in accordance with the hypothesis; this study can be used in universities, not only locally, but nationwide.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Review of Literature**

#### **Introduction**

College food service operations have undergone a dramatic change in the last twenty years. Envision the college-dining hall of the twentieth century, a large mess hall that served food from unending cafeteria lines with less than friendly staff. Ushering in the millennium one would find a much different university dining experience. The 21<sup>st</sup> century's college dining facility emulates that of a food court found in a local shopping mall, or kiosks scattered strategically through out the campus. Long gone are the days of cafeteria style dining. These new food service outlets offer everything from fast food favorites and designer coffees and cookies, to down home cooking. It is apparent that college food service management finally realized that their customer's expectations needed to be met.

#### **Review**

According to the book "Delivering Quality Service, Balancing Customer Perceptions and Expectations" by Valerie A. Zeithaml, A. Parasuraman, and Leonard L. Berry there are several factors that influence a customer's expectations. These factors include

- 1) Word of mouth communications- what customers hear from other customers?
- 2) Personal needs- dependent on a customers individual characteristics and circumstances.
- 3) Past experiences- what past experiences using the service could influence the customer's expectation levels.

- 4) External communications- this includes a variety of direct and indirect messages conveyed by service firms to customers. One of the most important types of external communications is price. "...price plays an important role in shaping expectations, particularly those of prospective customers of a service", Zeithaml, V., Parasuraman, A., Berry, L. (1990).

Trying to measure customer's perceptions can become a very difficult task and management must become very creative in their efforts. Management must move beyond utilizing the tools of customer surveys, customer complaints, input from employees who interact with customers, quality audits etc... Managers need to realize that these tools only provide a view of their service from the customers who have had a really good experience and those who have encountered a bad one. Managers need to delve deeper into the service their customers are receiving. As stated in the book "Service Breakthroughs. Changing the Rules of the Game" by Heskett, J., Sasser Jr., E., Hart, C., "Obtaining an accurate measure of service quality is also a challenge because of the difficulty of directly supervising and controlling the service transaction, because the output of a service often is intangible and the perception of its quality is necessarily subjective judgment, and because an individual perception often cannot be related to what actually was delivered".

Managers need not only look at the end product, they need to look at the different services that their customers are encountering within the operation. For example when talking about college food service, how long are students waiting in line to order their food, how long does it take for them to receive it, etc... The dining manager should also benchmark with other area colleges to see how the customer's satisfaction of these dining

services measure up or differs from theirs. The college dining manager needs to look at every aspect of the service that their customers are encountering.

When discussing the customer's expectations it becomes imperative that a manager not only looks at the quality of service delivered, but he or she must also look at the customer's perception of quality. As stated in "Business Horizons" by Zeithaml, V., Parasuraman, A., Berry, L. (1988), there are certain dimensions that customers believe about quality. These dimensions include:

- 1) Reliability – The ability to perform the desired service dependably, accurately, and consistently.
- 2) Responsiveness – The willingness to provide prompt service and help customers.
- 3) Assurance – Employees' knowledge, courtesy, and ability to convey trust and confidence.
- 4) Empathy – The provision of caring, individualize attention to customers.
- 5) Tangibles – The physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel.

These five dimensions are what college dining managers need to see when looking at the total picture of customer service. It becomes apparent that the customer's perceptions of service are as important as the service that is received. When a customer perception of a service organization is proven wrong, how will this establishment ever regain the customer's trust again? Will this customer think twice about using these services again?

The following authors and their books include models about how a manager can look at and provide better service for his or her customers. These authors and books are:

- Linda M. Lash (1991), the author of the book "The Complete Guide to Customer Service" talks about the fundamentals that she feels are essential to



implementing a customer driven quality service program. The ten fundamentals include:

- 1) It starts with commitment.
- 2) Get the right people to deliver the service.
- 3) Create an organization structure that fosters service.
- 4) Train and develop people to deliver service.
- 5) Deliver perception of a superior product.
- 6) Gear performance to deliver service as a number one priority.
- 7) Continuously create the opportunity for people to deliver superior service
- 8) Advertise and sell service and stand behind it.
- 9) Be ready to do handsprings to resolve each perceived service failure.
- 10) Measure, evaluate, and pay attention to actual service delivery.

- Robert L. Desatinick (1993) the author of the book “Managing to Keep the Customer: How to Achieve and Maintain Superior Customer Service Throughout the Organization offers the following seven points for managers to use to emulate that of a superior quality service program:

- 1) Develop effective human resource practices.
- 2) Build a customer-oriented workforce through the recruitment, hiring, and orientation process.
- 3) Establish and maintain high standards of customer service.
- 4) Train employees to make a visible difference for the customer.

- 5) Appraise customer service performance and identify problems and find solutions.
- 6) Motivate and reward customer service excellence.
- 7) Measure customer service results.

- The authors Ron Zemke and Dick Schaaf (1990) of the book “The Service Edge: 101 Companies that Profit From Customer Care” offer yet another model which includes five principles of distinctive service. These principles include the following:

- 1) Listen, understand, and respond to customers.
- 2) Define superior service and establish a service strategy.
- 3) Set standards and measure performance.
- 4) Select, train, and empower employees to work for the customer.
- 5) Recognize and reward accomplishment.

When so many models are depicted it starts to become evident that there are common threads that run through each one. The four main themes that keep emerging from the aforementioned models are the following:

1. Strategy
2. Management and Employees
3. Systems
4. Customers

The above themes become more tangible when looking at the concept of the service triangle. The Service Triangle, introduced in the book “Service America” by Ron Zemke

and Karl Albrecht (1985), focuses on the first three themes: Strategy, Management and Employees, and Systems. These three themes are centered on the Customer. This triangle represents what management should be committed to, infusing a customer driven quality service program into their business.

As mentioned there are a number models of quality service programs that a manager could choose from to pattern a program after. Once a quality service program is selected how can the manager properly implement it. Albrecht (1988) from his book "At America's Service discusses how to develop a service strategy. Albrecht states "A Service strategy is a distinctive formula for delivering service; such a strategy is keyed to a well chosen benefit premise that is valuable to the customer and that establishes an effective competitive position." This service strategy is extremely important because it allows the customer; the employees, and the managers to all see what the actual business is and assists all that are involved with the business to remain focused on the organization's goals and objectives. As Albrecht states "An effective service strategy meets the following criteria:

1. It is nontrivial; is has weight. It must be more than simply a "motherhood" statement or slogan. It must be reasonably concrete and action oriented.
2. It must convey a concept or a mission which people in the organization can understand, relate to, and somehow put into action.
3. It must offer or relate to a critical benefit premise that is important to the customer. It must focus on something the customer is willing to pay for.
4. It must differentiate the organization in some meaningful way from its competitors in the eyes of the customer.

5. If at all possible, it should be simple, unitary, easy to put into words, and easy to explain to the customer.

In the simplest possible terms, the service strategy answers the question: Why should the customer choose us?”

In the book “Service Breakthroughs: changing the Rules of the Game”, authors Heskett, Sasser and Hart offer a detailed schematic that they call the “basic elements of a strategic service vision. These authors believe that this strategic service vision is essential to a successful business strategy. The Basic and Integrative Elements of a Strategic Service Vision include:

1. Target Market Segments.
2. Positioning.
3. Service Concept.
4. Value-Cost Leveraging.
5. Operating Strategy.
6. Strategy-System Integration.
7. Service Delivery System.

The authors believe that the positioning; leverage and integration are the three integrative elements that provide the glue that holds together an effective strategic service vision among outstanding service firms.

It is imperative that once a successful strategy is in place that everyone in the organization buys into it. There must be some form of commitment from everyone involved in the organization, from top-level management through front line employees. Management is responsible to properly communicate the business’ strategy constantly;



institute challenging goals that are dictated by the strategy; encourage everyone in the organization to initiate their own strategies that are conducive with their areas of the business; make the strategy a permanent part of the “woodwork”.

The business at hand must become a customer-focused business. All employees including managers and frontline employees must become customer oriented. It is imperative that a business empowers all of its employees. As stated in the book “Service Management For Competitive Advantage” by James A. Fitzsimmons and Mona J. Fitzsimmons (1994) “...people want to do good work and will do so if given the opportunity”. Empowerment is the art of vesting substantial responsibility in the people nearest to the problems to be solved. The actual term empowerment means giving someone power. In the aforementioned book they state that successful companies who have embraced empowerment of their employees made the following commitments:

1. To invest in people as much as or more than in machines.
2. To use technology to support contact personnel rather than to monitor or replace them.
3. To consider the recruitment and training of contact personnel as to be critical to the firm’s success.
4. To link compensation to performance for employees at all levels.

Managers in this style of organization aren’t in the traditional role of supervisor/task master instead managers in this organization becomes a facilitator. .

When a business empowers its employees it can expect improvements in quality, productivity, motivation, customer service, and morale according to the book “Total Quality” by James W. Dean, Jr. and James R. Evans (1994). Dean and Evans also state

that there are a number of principles that are involved in successfully giving power to employees. These principles include the following:

1. Empower Sincerely and Completely- Managers must empower for its improvement value and not for the value it will receive from public relations.
2. Establish Mutual Trust- Trust must be backed up by actions.
3. Provide Employees with Business Information- Employees must have access to the necessary information about the business and its performance.
4. Ensure that Employees are Capable – Employee capability can be ensured through proper selection (hiring procedures) and proper training programs.
5. Don't Ignore Middle Management – Middle managers in organizations with empowered employees will be allowed to maintain focus on the organization's values, manage solutions to system level problems, and act as facilitators and coaches.
6. Change the Reward System – the reward system involved should include all employees.

Empowerment sounds like such a strong word and it is. Karl Albrecht sums it up when he states in his book "The Northbound Train" (1994), " 'labor' is no longer an adequate label. The operative word is becoming people. The concept of discretionary effort is emerging as a key element of value creation in which the employee must be free to use his or her own commonsense skills and ideas to solve problems and exceed customer expectations. The difference between labor and people is in the differences between people themselves- their skills, experience, ideas, know-how, work styles, career ambitions, and motivators. Just as we have to learn to

see an individual in every customer, we have to learn to see an individual in every working person.”

Managers and employees need to realize that the customer is the key essential component of an organization, so businesses must provide the customer with Customer Friendly Systems. It is important that an organization designs their systems so that it mirrors the business strategy. Customer-friendly systems should be in place in all areas of the business whether the customers are external or internal (Albrecht, 1994). The customer must recognize that the facilities, procedures, methods and communication processes are all geared towards his or her needs in order for a business to be successful in the area of customer satisfaction.

The book “Delivering Quality Service; Balancing Customer Perceptions and Expectations” by Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry (1990), addresses the topic of potential causes of service quality shortfalls. In this chapter the authors developed a model from the research that they conducted. This model is called “The Conceptual Model of Service Quality”. This model is used to describe four integral internal shortfalls, which they dub as gaps. These gaps could result in poor quality service as perceived by the customer. The four gaps include the following:

- 1) The Customer Expectations – Management Perceptions Gap. There are three key factors involved in this gap. The three key factors are
  - Lack of marketing research orientation, evidenced by insufficient marketing research, inadequate use of research findings, and lack of interaction between management and customers.

- Inadequate upward communication from contact personnel to management.
  - Too many levels of management separating contact personnel from top managers.
- 2) The Management Perceptions – Service Quality Specifications Gap. These are four key factors involved in this gap:
- Inadequate commitment to service quality.
  - Lack of perception of feasibility
  - Inadequate task standardization
  - Absence of goal setting.
- 3) The Service – Quality Specifications –Service Delivery Gap. There are seven factors that are involved with this gap:
- Role Ambiguity.
  - Role conflict
  - Poor employee job fit.
  - Poor technology job fit.
  - Inappropriate supervisory control systems, which leads to an inappropriate evaluation/compensation system.
  - Lack of perceived control on the part of employees.
  - Lack of teamwork.
- 4) The Service Delivery – External Communications Gap. There are two key factors that are involved with the fourth gap.



- Inadequate horizontal communication, particularly among operations, marketing, and human resources, as well as across branches.
- Propensity to over promise in communication.

The authors give a multitude of ways to close each gap. However the one that pertains heavily to this research is gap number one. The first suggestion that is given to close the gap is “Researching Customers Expectations”. In this section the authors give a list of ways customers expectations can be researched, the list consists of the following; Strategic Use of Complaints – identifying problems in the service process; Customers desires in similar industries- developing an initial framework for customers expectations in focal industry; Research on intermediate customers- efficient way to gain in depth information on end customers; Key client studies – in depth information on most important customers; Customer panels – continuous source of information on changing customers expectations; Transaction based studies-provides feedback on service quality performance of each component of service quality; Comprehensive customer’s expectation studies; establishes measures that are customer based, provides foundations for tracking studies which provides a dynamic view of customer’s expectations and perceptions.

The second suggestion for closing the gap coinciding with this research is “Increasing Interaction Between Management and Customers”. This factor hits home because management has a tendency to stray away from what is most important to his or her business and that is the customer. Robert Crandall states “Commitment and dedication on the part of your people only happens when there is the same commitment and dedication on the part of the boss. Top management must confront the realities of the

marketplace daily.” As Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry state. “... direct interaction with customers adds clarity and depth to the manager’s understanding of customer’s expectations and needs.

### **Summary**

As we can see from this literature review there is an abundance of information pertaining to the subject of Quality Service. Businesses that are ready to implement a quality service strategy have their pick of several different models. It is up to the business to make sure once the model is selected that they implement it correctly and follow through with every step.

Quality service is only as good as the people behind it, if it isn’t instituted in the correct fashion it will fall apart and be thrown by the wayside. However if it is put in place properly and implemented the company will flourish and the customers will be satisfied. It is imperative in today’s market place that a company has an excellent strategy for a customer driven quality service system.

The information that has been stated in the above literature review will become useful to this thesis. The survey tool will help to identify if the dining center either has or doesn’t have a problem with its customer service system. If the findings are accurate and it finds that there is a problem, this literature will help to guide which customer service system will be good for the dining center management to implement.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

This study uses a survey instrument to gather the data needed for the research. The survey instrument was developed to determine the quality of food and service provided by the dining centers on a mid size university. The respondents of the survey were the students who utilized the different dining centers. The questionnaire contains two parts: The first four questions of the survey deal with demographic information. The last fifteen questions primarily deal with the factors of quality of service, food, and facilities.

#### **Research Methodology, Research Tool, Data Analysis, and Assumptions**

The first part of the survey dealt with demographic questions that related to academic year, age, ethnic background and gender. The quality portion of the survey is broken down into two sections. The first five questions of section II used a five point Likert-type rating scale with responses ranging from 1 = poor to 5 = excellent. This scale has been found to be simple to understand, thorough, and applicable to the food service industry (Vyskocil-Czajkowski, and Gilmore, 1992).

Part three of the quality section of the survey (questions ten through nineteen) was rated on a two point Likert scale. The questions that were asked in this section of the survey included menu variety, student involvement in menu planning, customer service, and customer value, cost versus quality.

**Figure 3.1: The Survey Section I**

The following is a model of the survey tool used for this study:

***A study focusing on the total quality of food and services provided by the Dining Centers.***

**I. DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND:**

*Check only one!*

- 1) How old are you?
  - ☐ Younger than 18 years old.
  - ☐ 18 to 20 years old.
  - ☐ 21 to 22 years old.
  - ☐ older than 22 years old.
- 2) What is your ethnic background?
  - ☐ Afro-American
  - ☐ Hispanic/Latino
  - ☐ Asian
  - ☐ Native American
  - ☐ Caucasian/White
  - ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) Are you?
  - ☐ Male
  - ☐ Female
- 4) What academic year are you in?
  - ☐ Freshman
  - ☐ Sophomore
  - ☐ Junior
  - ☐ Senior
  - ☐ Graduate Student

**Figure 3.2: The Survey Section II**

### **SURVEY PERCEPTIONS**

**II.** Please rank the following questions using this scale:

(5) *EXCELLENT*, (4) *ABOVE AVERAGE*, (3) *AVERAGE*, (2) *BELOW AVERAGE*,  
(1) *POOR*

5) How would you rate the overall quality of the food served in the dining center?

5	4	3	2	1
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6) How would you rate the meal selections that you are given when eating in the dining center?

5	4	3	2	1
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7) How would you rate the overall service provided by the staff of the dining center?

5	4	3	2	1
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8) How would you rate the atmosphere?

5	4	3	2	1
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

9) How would you rate the cleanliness?

5	4	3	2	1
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



**Figure 3.3: The Survey Section III.**

<b>III. Please respond to the following questions by checking only <i>one</i> box.</b>		<b><i>AGREE</i></b>	<b><i>DISAGRE.</i></b>
10)	The University of Rochester dining center offers a large variety of menu items.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11)	The management of the dining center has the student in mind when developing and planning the menu.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12)	The dining center offers meals for students with certain dietary restrictions (i.e. Vegetarian, Kosher, Healthy Heart).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13)	The dining center staff treats you as a valued customer.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14)	Dining services offers a wide range of dining alternatives throughout campus.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15)	The dining centers' ambiance is appealing.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16)	The dining center staff provides friendly and courteous to its patrons.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17)	Overall, the operating hours, Monday through Friday, are conducive with student's schedules.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18)	Overall the operating hours on weekends, Saturday and Sunday, are conducive with students schedules.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19)	The quality of food and service is worth the cost of the meal plan.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The survey was pilot-tested with seven resident assistant volunteers. These volunteers were from the residential life department on a mid size university campus. The average time to complete the survey was eight minutes, with a range of six to eleven minutes.

The actual administration of the survey took place in three different campus dining-centers. The resident assistant volunteers who initially took the pilot test assisted to administer the actual survey. The seven assistants plus the author of this thesis stood at the entrance of the each dining center to administer the survey. The surveys were administered to seventy full-time on campus students; sixty-seven of the surveys were usable. The surveys were given at the dinner hour over a one-week period and were only taken by students who volunteered their time to fully complete them. The dinner hour was chosen because the dining center management, who gave the approval for the on premise administration of the survey, conveyed that this was the busiest meal period.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Data Analysis**

#### **Introduction**

Responses to the survey will be covered in this chapter. A sample of the survey was provided in Chapter Three. The responses to the survey were in line with many of the methodological assumptions regarding the services that were provided by the dining services operation and how the students (customers) perceived these services. The students, who utilize the services of the dining operations, are the primary customers of the business.

#### **Section One of the Survey**

##### **Demographics**

Tables 4.1 through 4.4 contain the demographic characteristics of the survey's respondents. As indicated all of the respondents of the survey were full time undergraduate students. Males and females were relatively evenly represented, female respondents 52% and male respondents 48%. There was a greater representation among students of Caucasian/white ethnicity, Caucasian/White 51%, the second highest group were Afro-American students at 28%. Sixty three percent of the students questioned were between the ages of 21 and 22 years old. Over a third of the respondents were freshmen, 36%, and sophomores came in second with 7%.



## **Demographics**

**Table 4.1: Age**

Age	N	%
< Than 18	0	
18 to 20	22	33
21 to 22	42	63
> Than 22	3	4

**Table 4.2: Ethnicity**

Ethnicity	N	%
Afro-American	19	28
Hispanic/Latino	8	12
Asian	4	6
Native American	2	3
Caucasian/White	34	51

**Table 4.3: Gender**

Gender	N	%
Male	32	48
Female	35	52

**Table 4.4: Classification**

<b>Classification</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Freshmen	24	36
Sophomores	18	27
Juniors	14	21
Seniors	11	16

## **Section Two of the Survey**

### **Findings**

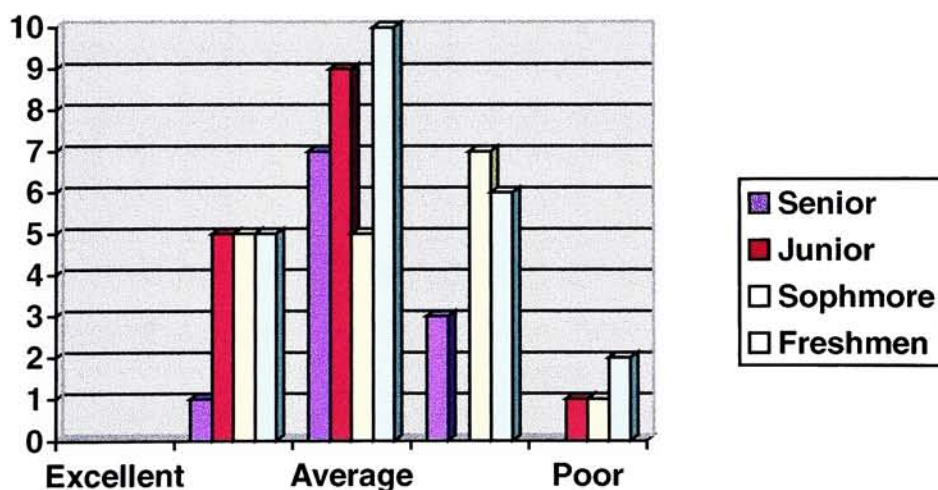
The responses to the second section of the survey will be covered in this chapter. The responses were in line with the methodological assumptions regarding the student's expectations, needs and wants. A sample of the survey was provided in Chapter Three. Responses to the twenty qualities of service, food and facilities statements were used to evaluate the respondent's satisfaction. While the survey yielded overall positive results, it identified several areas that could contribute to increased customer satisfaction. This research will identify these key areas.

Table 5.1 and Graph 5.1 represent the first question on the survey. The respondents were asked:

**Table 5.1: How would you rate the overall quality of the food served in the dining center?**

Class Year	Excellent	Above Average	Average	Below Average	Poor
Senior		1	7	3	
Junior		5	9		1
Sophomore		5	5	7	1
Freshmen		5	10	6	2

**Chart 5.1: How would you rate the overall quality of the food served in the dining center?**



As shown in Chart 5.1 above the respondents to this survey overwhelmingly chose average as their response to this question. A majority of the sophomores on the other hand selected below average as their score. Fewer than two students from the junior

sophomore and freshmen class felt that the quality of food served was of poor quality, Not one member of any of the respondents chose excellent as their rating, which shows that there is definite room for improving the quality of the food served. It is important to realize that the quality of food severely effects the quality of service or the lack there of.

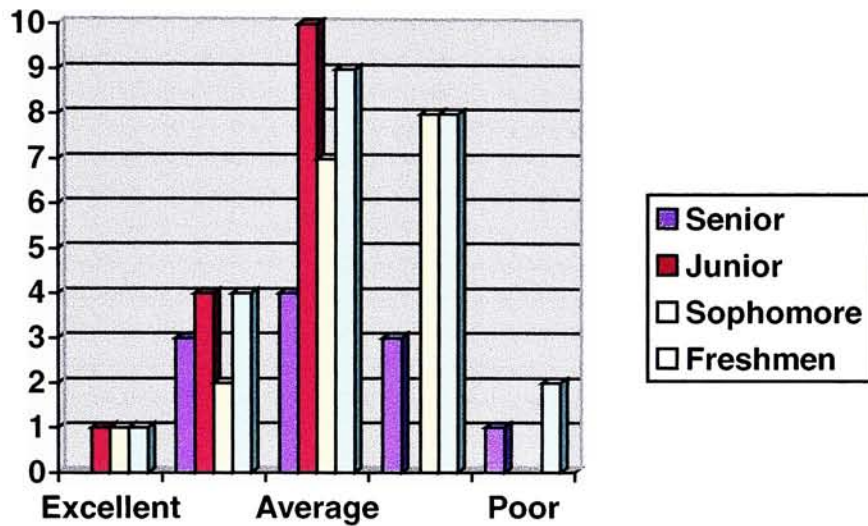
There are several things that can be done to assist in improving the quality of food. Management should start by looking to see if they are allowing their employees to be truly empowered. Employees are out on the frontline talking with the customers on a one to one basis. Management needs to be able to communicate with their employees and to find out what the customer wants.

As Karl Albrecht states in his book “At America’s Service”, “...frontline employee has a better grasp of the fundamentals of the situation than the manager did.” Albrecht talks about Carlzon from SAS and how Carlzon believed that he needed to shift the culture of his company in the direction of empowering the frontline people to make more decisions and to solve problems on their own without consulting the mangers.

**Table 5.2: How would you rate the meal selections that you are given when eating in the dining centers?**

<b>Class Year</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Above Average</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Below Average</b>	<b>Poor</b>
<b>Senior</b>		<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Junior</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>		
<b>Sophomore</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	
<b>Freshmen</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>

**Chart 5.2: How would you rate the meal selections that you are given when eating in the dining centers?**



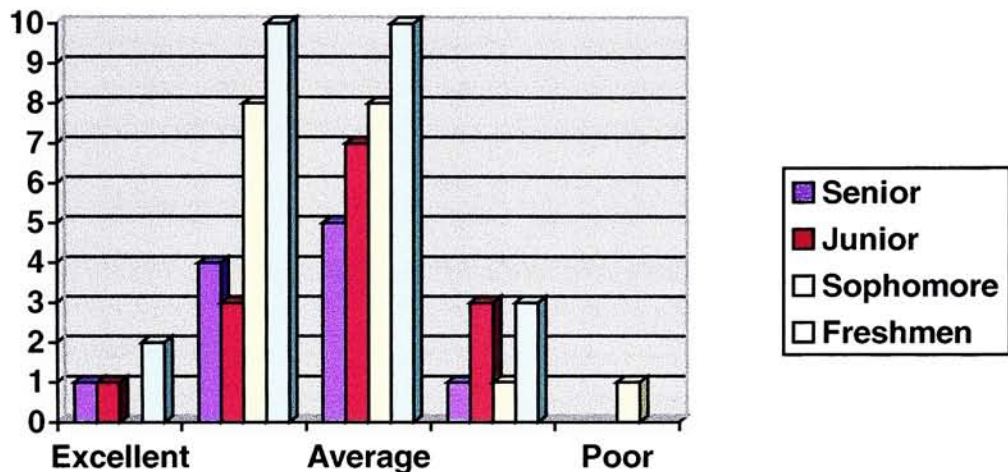
In chart 5.2 the mean score is 3.5, indicating the respondents felt that the meal selections that they were served were only average. An environment that welcomed the customer's ideas and concerns could impact a higher mean score.

**Table 5.3: How would you rate the overall service provided by the staff of the dining center?**

Class Year	Excellent	Above Average	Average	Below Average	Poor
Senior	1	4	5	1	
Junior	1	3	7	3	
Sophomore		8	8	1	1
Freshmen	2	10	10	3	



**Chart 5.3: How would you rate the overall service provided by the staff of the dining center?**



In chart 5.3 it is evident that both freshmen and sophomore respondents feel that the service that is received falls between the above average and average rating. Only one person out of the seventy people surveyed felt that the service that they received was poor. Less than a total of eight people out of the seventy surveyed felt that the service they received was below average. Management needs to look at how the respondents rated the service they received and not be satisfied with the findings; instead they should seek ways of improving the overall service that their customers are receiving. As stated previously in the literature review, there are several service strategies to choose from. However it is up to management to figure out which one will better suit the needs of their organization.

The next two questions on the survey both deal directly with what is referred to as “tangibles”. As Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry mention in the book “Delivering

Quality Service”, tangibles are considered the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials. These questions encompass the facility’s atmosphere and cleanliness. Both of these survey questions are pertinent to the survey because they both could tremendously affect the customer’s perception of service. Would it be appealing to a customer to walk into a dining hall and find litter strewn all over the floor, and would it be inviting for a customer to not be able to talk with their friends because the noise level in the dining hall was too loud. Of course these are just examples, but what if they really happened wouldn’t this hinder the overall service the customer was experiencing.

In the following table and charts (5.4 and 5.5) it is obvious to see that most respondents rated the atmosphere and the cleanliness in the average to above average category. It is evident in the tables and charts that one respondent in the freshmen and sophomore class felt that the atmosphere was poor and there were no respondents who rated the cleanliness as poor. However let’s look at the other end of the rating scale and we find very few respondents who found the atmosphere and cleanliness of the facility to be in excellent condition. If a manager rests on his or her laurels and is happy with these ratings, they could slip from above average right down to the poor rating. Managers need to be proactive and strive to improve all aspects of their operations.

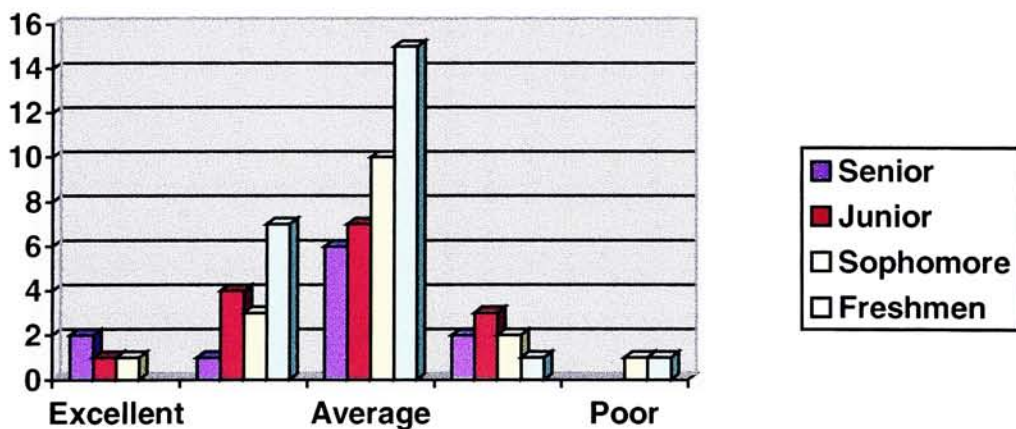
As Heskett, Sasser, and Hart state in their book “Service Breakthroughs”, “Good service organizations set out to meet customers’ expectations. Outstanding service companies specifically seek to impress customers in ways they will never forget. They do it by managing first (and last) impressions and by balancing attention to substance and “style” in designing and delivering services.” They go on to state, “The stage for the

service experience is set in the first few minutes of the situations. Once the tone has been established, it is difficult to change a customer's impression of what follows." If patrons are turned off by the atmosphere and cleanliness of your facility from the moment they enter, than there is a slim chance that any service you provide them in their dining experience will wipe out those initial thoughts.

**Table 5.4: Atmosphere**

Class Year	Excellent	Above Average	Average	Below Average	Poor
Senior	2	1	6	2	
Junior	1	4	7	3	
Sophomore	1	3	10	2	1
Freshmen		7	15	1	1

**Chart 5.4: Atmosphere**

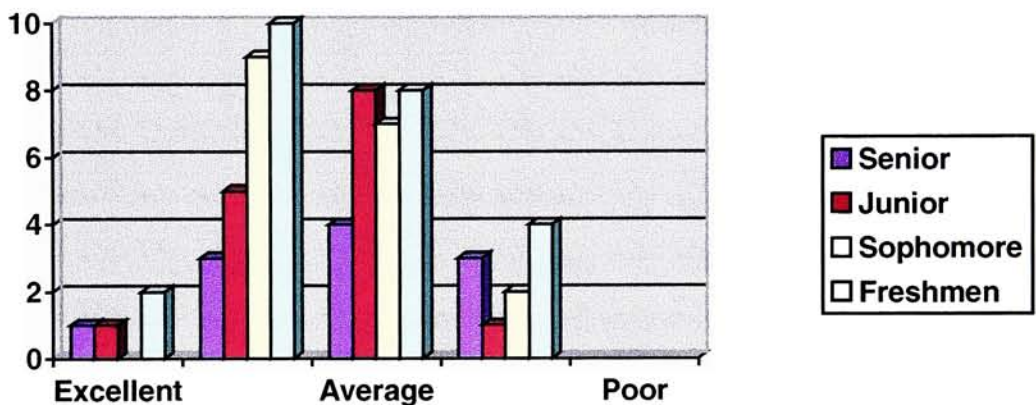




**Table 5.5: Cleanliness**

Class Year	Excellent	Above Average	Average	Below Average	Poor
Senior	1	3	4	3	
Junior	1	5	8	1	
Sophomore		9	7	2	
Freshmen	2	10	8	4	

**Chart 5.5: Cleanliness**



The next ten questions of the survey were set up for the respondents to respond to them with the answer of agree or disagree. This questions in this segment were also grouped together to reflect of questions were designed to look at different aspects of the business even though they all fall under the service umbrella. The first group was labeled “Menu Offerings”. In this group the questions that the students were asked included the following:

- The dining center offers a large variety of menu items?

- The management of the dining center has the student in mind when developing and planning the menu?
- The dining center offers meals for students with certain dietary restrictions?
- Dining services offers a wide range of dining alternatives throughout the campus?

The following table represents the total respondents' percentages to these questions:

**Table 5.6: Percentages of the Menu Selections and Dining Alternatives**

**Offered to Students.**

Questions	Agree	Disagree
The dining center offers a large variety of menu items?	59%	41%
The management of the dining center has the student in mind when developing and planning the menu?	51%	49%
The dining center offers meals for students with certain dietary restrictions (i.e. Vegetarian, Kosher etc...)?	59%	41%
Dining Services offers a wide range of dining alternatives throughout campus?	44%	56%

As shown in the above table it is clear that the total respondents, with a narrow margin, were close to a 50/50 split on all of the questions. Management needs to take a look at these numbers and figure out what needs to be changed. When looking at this table the number one area that jumps out are the lack of communication between dining services and its customers.

Margaret J. Wheatley from the book "Leadership and the New Science" quotes James Gleick, "Information is unique as a resource because of its capacity to generate itself. It's solar energy of organization – inexhaustible, with new progeny emerging every time information meets up with itself. As long as there are senders and receivers linked together in a context, fertility abounds. All that is needed is freedom of circulation to

guarantee new births. In fact, the greatest generator of information is chaos, where so much spawning of information goes on that researchers feel obliged to monitor every moment of the system's activity lest they miss something (Gleick 1987)."

Communication is the most important tool a manager can use to inform not only the external customer but the internal customer as well. If a manager does not communicate with his or her customers the business will suffer and will cease to exist, however like the quote above states, "As long as there are senders and receivers linked together in a context, fertility abounds." Management not only needs to communicate with his or her customers, management needs to listen to them as well. When management thinks and acts on communication, they must think of it as a two way street. Allowing information to flow in both directions.

The next question specifically asks the respondents if they feel that the dining center staff (front line employees and management) treats them as a valued customer. As shown in the Table 11 and Chart 11a below, the respondents clearly feel they are valued as a customer in the dining center. Sixty four percent of the respondents agreed and thirty six percent disagreed. A manager needs to look at the thirty six percent of the customers and wonder what he or she is doing wrong. Why is there such a large majority of respondents who feel they are not valued customers? As Karl Albrecht states in his book "The Northbound Train", that a manager needs to know what value they need to provide in order to win and keep the customer's business. Mr. Albrecht states that managers need to utilize a customer value model, which consists of "... a set of critical factors that define customer value from the customer's point of view".

Karl Albrecht states that if management is "...going to make their strategy-development approach customer-focused, we must find the invisible truth – the customer's perception of value." Mr. Albrecht identifies the customer value model as "... a set of critical criteria that constitute the customer's perception of value in the entire experience of doing business with us." He likens the customer value model to that of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The Hierarchy of customer value includes four levels from lowest to highest. These levels include the following:

- 1) Basic: fundamental components of the customer value package required just to be in business.
- 2) Expected: what the customers consider normal for you and your competitors.
- 3) Desired: added value features that the customers know about and would like to have but don't necessarily expect because of the current level of performance of your competitors.
- 4) Unanticipated: added value features that go well beyond the learned expectations and desires the customer brings to the experience of doing business with you.

Management involved in college campus dining centers need to stop thinking of their customers as a captive audience. In today's market of delivery and convenience foods, not to mention grocery stores offering complete meals, management of the dining centers, need to start paying closer attention to the possible loss of customers to these competitors. According to this survey it is evident that there are a lot of customers who feel that they are not valued by the staff. Managers need to implement more than just the

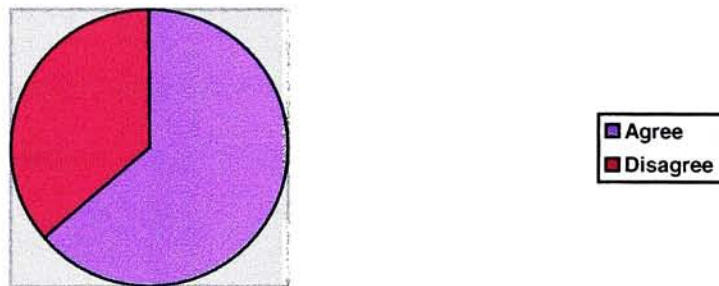


basics. They need go above and beyond the expected features of their business and show their customers how important they are to their organization. The key to going above and beyond the basic and expected features of your business is to make sure that what management is doing is creating significant value in the eyes of the customer.

**Table 5.7: The dining center staff treats you as a valued customer?**

	Agree	Disagree
Senior	7	4
Junior	6	8
Sophomore	20	5
Freshmen	9	11

**Chart 5.7: The dining center staff treats you as a valued customer?**



The last five questions of the survey deal with overall service, the physical facility, personnel, and operating hours. These questions once again can be referred to as “tangibles”. As seen below in Table 12 the respondent’s answers have been broken down into percentages.



**Table 5.8: Responses to Survey Questions 15 through 19.**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
<b>The dining center's ambiance is appealing?</b>	<b>41 %</b>	<b>59 %</b>
<b>The dining center staff provides friendly and courteous service to their patrons</b>	<b>74 %</b>	<b>26 %</b>
<b>Overall, the operating hours, Monday through Friday, are conducive with student's schedules?</b>	<b>80 %</b>	<b>20 %</b>
<b>Overall, the operating hours on weekends, Saturday and Sunday, are conducive with student's schedules.</b>	<b>59 %</b>	<b>41 %</b>
<b>The quality of food and service is worth the cost of the meal plan?</b>	<b>34 %</b>	<b>66 %</b>

There are two areas that stand out the most when looking at the table above the first one is that 74% of the respondents felt that the staff was providing friendly and courteous service to the customer, however only 34% of the same respondents felt that the quality and service they were receiving was not worth the cost of what they were paying. Customers tend to view quality of service associated with cost in a negative light. In this case management needs to institute higher standards of service that is provided to their customer at the same or lower cost. Now we all know that it is near impossible to lower the cost especially on a college campus, however management can definitely raise the bar for the quality of service they provide to their customers.

As mentioned earlier in the literature review it is imperative that managers of the dining centers incorporate a strategic service vision for dining services as a whole. All the managers need to work together with their employees to strategically implement this vision into their organizations. But before a vision can be implemented it needs to be developed. As stated in the book "Service Breakthroughs" by Hesser, Sasser, and Hart, a business needs to "define their service concept and their businesses in terms of results

produced for their customers, identify target customers, develop operating strategies that leverage value for customers over cost, and design service delivery systems that offer customer assurance and tangible evidence of the service as well as reliability and timeliness.”

Dining service managers need to know what they are trying to achieve for their customer. If they want to provide a top quality product with fast and courteous service than they need to direct all their energies to these factors. When these concepts are determined they need to focus on knowing who their target customers are? Would the students be their only target customers? What about the internal customer (the frontline employee) who is always on a one to one basis with the students? Both of these customers would be the dining services target customers. who frequent their establishments? From here the dining managers need to formulate an operating strategy, taking into consideration the operations, financing, marketing, organization, human resources and control. After the operating strategy is designed, it must be complemented with a service delivery system. The service delivery system includes the following important features: the role of people, technology, equipment, facilities, layout, procedures, and the capacity it will provide and normal and peak levels of service.

The data for this study show that there is a mixed census of how students perceive the service that dining service offers them. Although throughout the survey the respondents had positive perception of the dining experience, it was clear that the food service management should take every opportunity to implement a service strategy into their operation. If the implementation of such a strategy is successful the management of the food service operations could see a steady increase in customer satisfaction.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations.**

#### **Introduction**

This study represents the students dining expectations, needs and wants versus what they actually receive in mid size University. Some questions needed to be considered and they came to light in the introduction of this study. Are students given alternatives when choosing the time of the day they would like to eat their meals? Are they given many choices to the types of foods they want to eat or the in the type of dining atmosphere? This study attempted to address these questions through utilization of a survey tool. The data that was collected from the survey and the industry trends examined in the literature review portray a vision of how customer service should be addressed. This study provides solutions to effectively solve the problem.

#### **Summary of the Literature Review**

The literature review provided 15 articles that focused primarily on the theme of customer satisfaction. The main subtopics that were mentioned in the literature review were:

- 1) The customer's expectations as it relates to the service received.
- 2) The customer's perception of the service received.
- 3) Models of Quality Service programs for managers to implement in their organizations.
- 4) The business as a whole must become a customer focused business.



The literature review put emphasis on reviewing literature that provided different views on the quality of service provided to customers. Although some of the literature that was reviewed was written over a decade ago the information provided still holds true. The research data in conjunction with the literature review supports the findings that organizations need to be aware of their customer's expectations, needs and wants and how these services will effectively be delivered to them.

### **Summary of the Methodology Used**

This study utilized a survey tool that was used to survey student customers in a midsize university. The methodology that was used in this study used both the data collected from the survey and the information gathered from the literature review.

### **Meaning of the Results**

While the results of the study offer ideas for a specific university, the findings in this research project could be generalized to other university food service operations. The purpose of this study was to find out if there were quality and service gaps between student dining expectations, needs and wants and what is actually received. As witnessed in the survey there are some gaps between the service and quality that is expected and received. Although the gaps are not large, management still has an issue it needs to answer. How are they going to close the gaps that are present? Based on both the data from the review of literature and from the survey, this study supports the hypothesis and goes on to make recommendations concerning the gaps that do exist between the

student's expectations, needs and wants and what they actually receive from dining services.

As discussed in the literature review one of the most common themes presented were the customer's perception of the service they received. In today's marketplace of convenient fast food restaurants and grocery stores which offer their customer's everything from authentic Asian fare to Submarine sandwiches, managers and employees of all different food operations need to be keen to what the expectations, needs and wants of their customers are.

The data from the survey confirms that the customers of the dining centers in this particular university were not completely satisfied with the overall services that were provided to them. The results of this study provide clear guidance for the management of the dining units as they attempt to meet the ever-changing needs, wants and expectations of their customers.

### **Recommendations for Improvements**

To fulfill the customer's expectations, the food service operation needs to develop a well-focused service strategy that will increase satisfaction both in quality and in service. One of the key ways to accomplish this is for management to empower their employees. Management needs to understand that service is a key factor and their front line employees are an integral component of the ongoing service encounter. Management needs to determine the appropriate service strategy that would best fit his or her organization to accomplish this goal. This study has touched on a small sampling of quality service strategies. Using this information, it then becomes a necessity that



management spends the time and money in training their employees on how to provide a personal interaction between the employee and the customer.

It is essential that food service operations deliver not only a quality product, but quality service as well. Employees, both management and front line employees must be provided with the knowledge and techniques that will assist them in providing this quality service. The planning and implementation of a quality service program can be a very difficult task and at times may feel like an up hill battle. However if the implementation is done correctly not only will the organization, but also ,more importantly, the customer benefit in the long run.

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