

Food For Thought

As students, we are required to have a meal plan on campus. This wouldn't be so bad if only the restaurants on campus were open reasonable hours. This is a problem for myself as well as many other students on campus. We are unable to eat when we want and are able to. I propose that they extend hours so that students can make the most of their meal plan while living on campus. This plan can be implemented on weekends to start and then extend during the week. This would increase the amount of students staying on campus, more students would use their meal plans, and it would save students money. The only ones able to change these issues would be Dining Services or even someone in higher authority.

UALR is used to being a commuter school so it is not used to having students on campus 24/7. There are weekends when a lot of students don't go home, which means they have to eat somewhere. They cannot, however, eat on campus because there are no restaurants open on Saturdays and very limited hours on Sundays. There have been many weekends where I have stayed and not been able to get food on campus so i have to either make my own or go out to eat and spend more money. It is even harder on students who don't or cannot drive. They have no way to travel to get to other food options. During the weekdays, places like Taco Bell, Starbucks, and Quiznos close at 6, leaving students who get out of class at 7 with no where to eat on campus. I'm not sure of the reasoning behind the hours, but something needs to change.

My proposal would be to extend food hours into the weekend and also throughout the week. Not having a place to eat on the weekend discourages students from staying on campus. I would require all campus restaurants to be open on the weekends. Most of them are only open on Sundays on the weekend. The weekend hours include the following: Diamond Cafe: Regular

hours on Friday, Brunch 11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. and Dinner 5:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday; Food Court: 10:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. on Friday, closed on Saturday and Sunday; Trojan Grill: closed on Friday and Saturday, 7:00 p.m.-10:00 p.m. on Sunday. For the weekend, the hours could be the same on Friday and Saturday as they are on Sunday, with the exception of the food court which should have the same hours as the regular week hours. During the week, I would propose an extension to the hours already in place. The hours in place are as follows: Diamond Cafe: Breakfast 7:00 a.m.-9:00 a.m., Lunch 11:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., Dinner 5:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m; Food Court: 10:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m., excluding Starbucks who is open 7:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m.; Trojan Grill: 4:00 p.m.-10:00 p.m. There are other restaurants on campus such as SubConnection in the EIT building, Business Brewing in the Business building, and the Commons Market, but these are just the main ones. Since there are night classes, keep the cafeteria and food court open until at least nine, rather than 6 or 7. This would allow students who have later classes to eat once they get out. If the week hours increased, then the weekends could have reduced hours rather than no hours at all like what is currently in place. Many students around campus can be heard complaining about having to pay for a meal plan. With more time to eat during the week, students are less likely to complain because they are able to get their money's worth.

There is no true easy way to solve this problem because I can see the issues in this plan such as cost for workers and more food. Millions of dollars are being spent on the upkeep of restaurants and the payment of workers already, so I can see where hard decisions have to be made. However, the university is losing money when students do not use the money on their meal plans. It just sits there. Implementing new and improved hours would increase the amount

being spent and put back into the college. Recently, I have noticed that the Trojan Grill has altered their hours just slightly, adding an extra hour at the opening time, so it is possible to increase hours, even just a little bit. Workplace jobs outside of campus are seven days a week and at least eight hours straight, for the most part. A college campus restaurant should be no different.

Also, adding more hours opens up opportunities for students to come in as workers under a work study. UALR students who cannot get scholarships would be more than happy to do a work study to pay off their school. The university isn't gaining money, but it isn't losing money either.

This year alone, UALR is expected to spend over \$156 million. This covers compensation, benefits, maintenance and operations, travel, capital, debt service, and scholarships. Included in this is payment to Sodexo who operates the restaurants. The numbers are not in for this year yet, but in most recent years, UALR has managed to maintain assets of over \$330 million. This would put them in the black with room for more spending if needed. Things like food would be good investments for the students.

In summation, I propose a change in UALR's campus food hours. I would like to see an increase in the hours during the week as well as added hours on the weekend. During the week, the hours should extend to at least nine rather than six and seven. During the weekend, the hours should be what is currently in place on Sunday. Many students on campus would be more willing to stay if there were food options. This change would be for the betterment of the University and the students in attendance. It would also benefit future students who may be considering coming

to college here. Knowing that there are good food hours on campus would be appealing to a prospective student.