

On campus dietary options

Institutions of higher education hold a responsibility to foster campuses wherein students can reasonably access basic needs. Included in these needs are dietary options which align with students' preferences and requirements, either due to medical circumstances, personal choice, or religion. To be a member of the campus community should mean to be able to adequately locate food, both in dining centers and through vender services. In partnership with the entire community of individuals, including but not limited to students, institutions of higher education can provide these accommodations and options as a part of a normalized environment.

Expectations of dietary options for RSSIs

While support for the diverse religious, secular, and spiritual identities (RSSIs) of students is often challenging and requires diligence, the presence of religiously sensitive dietary options is a straightforward and highly effective step. The following concepts should be applied when addressing this need. Dietary options should:

1. Include kosher, halal, and lacto-vegetarian options;
2. Have the above options present in both dining centers and throughout the campus as part of vender services;
3. Be available at appropriate times throughout the day and year as needed by students with diverse religious identities; and
4. Hold to high standards which are effectively communicated to the campus community.

On kosher, halal, and lacto-vegetarian options

Higher education must take seriously the various food needs of students from diverse religious communities: For Jewish students, the need is for kosher options; for Muslim students, halal. Others, such as Hindu students, require lacto-vegetarian options. Comprehensively, these needs may require institutions to seriously consider the use of pork and beef products in menus, and how foods with these ingredients are placed within dining centers and throughout campus vending locations.

On placement in dining centers and campus vendors

Institutions of higher education often serve only a minor population of students using dining hall services. Options must therefore be made available throughout the campus, in order to reach commuter students, those living off-campus, and staff throughout the institution.



On options being available at appropriate times during the day and year

Ramadan, the most sacred month of the Muslim year, requires fasting by Muslims from sunrise to sunset. Additional traditions also practice an act of fasting, including the Bahá'í community, which fasts on the 19 days before the new year during a time known as Bahá'u'lláh. Dietary provisions should be put into place to respond to the traditions of both of these communities. Dietary options for minority religious students should be offered at a similar standard as regular, daily meals, ensuring that students observing Ramadan, Bahá'u'lláh, and other fasting days still have access to high quality meals.

On effectively communicating to the campus body

To reduce the stigmas around what are often presented as “special” provisions, Convergence advises institutions to creating more visibility for these dietary options, as well as provide students with educational opportunities to learn more. We fundamentally reject any form of tokenizing of these dietary options and the subconscious but overt exoticizing that routinely accompanies their placement as part of the dietary options on campus.

To make sure that campuses are a healthy and safe place, we advise institutions to address these needs proactively. Instead of waiting for a certain number of students enrolled on campus to ask that their dietary needs be fulfilled, we recommend undertaking these changes knowing that existing students, staff, and faculty will be served by these provisions. As well, these options are necessary to attract students to institutions of higher education and are a recommended tool for diversifying enrollment.

